

THE USTASHE POLITICS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

Relation between the state-organized and wild ethnic cleansing in the Independent State of Croatia during 1941

By

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing and mass violence in the Independent State of Croatia during 1941. The aim is to analyze the research gap between the state-organized and other methods of conducting ethnic cleansing, appearing simultaneously, during the first months of the Ustashe being in power. Current scholarship puts an overwhelming emphasis on the state and party agencies in conducting mass murder, and diminishes the role of other factors, such as grassroots, in the process.

My argument is that state-organized ethnic cleansing had a limited role in the first months of the Ustashe being in power, because of institutional underdevelopment, lack of expertise, understaffing and issues regarding concentration camp systems. Simultaneously with the state-organized ethnic cleansing, a process of wild or mass violence was employed towards, primarily, Serbs. One of the prime actors in conducting this wild ethnic cleansing were the so called Wild Ustashe. These grassroots groups were created under the propaganda and encouragement of a part of the Ustashe elite. Wild ethnic cleansing was indirectly organized by the regime, but it was not implemented according to the plan or the state hierarchy.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the complexity of agents and methods in conducting ethnic cleansing in NDH through analysis of archival documents, newspapers and testimonies. I will examine the question of why were the Jews and Roma primarily targeted by the state-organized genocide, while the wild one was primarily oriented towards the Serbs throughout the first year of the Ustashe reign. On a macro level I will demonstrate the relation between the wild ethnic cleansing and the state-organized one, and further tensions which existed between the two. On a micro level I will discuss the relationship between the Wild Ustashe, the state and the party organs which entered an open conflict that escalated in the late summer of 1941.

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Introduction

Image of concentration camps, the most infamous occurrence of the mid-twentieth century, became the symbol of atrocities committed during the Second World War in Europe. Overwhelming emphasis has been put on Auschwitz, which had eventually become the most important symbol in interpreting the Holocaust on the European and global level of public memory. Similar trends can also be followed on the national level of Croatia. Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp in Europe where mass murder was conducted without the participation of SS, also became the dominant prism through which ethnic cleansing in the Independent State of Croatia was interpreted both on a public and scholarly level.¹ However, both narratives of interpreting mass murder committed by the Nazis and Ustashe, through the motif of domination of concentration camps, are deceiving because they tend to reduce the complexity of mass murder to these entities and minimize the one happening outside the camp systems. The problem with the camp narrative of mass murder is that it blurs the fuller picture of what was happening during that time. Timothy Snyder, regarding this issue, noted that

Most Soviet and Polish Jews under German occupation had already been murdered by the time Auschwitz became the major death factory. By the time gas chambers and crematoria complexes at Birkenau came on line in spring 1943, more than three quarters of the Jews who would be killed in the Holocaust were already dead.²

¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* [Holocaust in Zagreb] (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2001), 304.

² Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 383.

Similar remarks can be made about the case of the Ustashe terror over the Serbs, Jews and Roma in the Independent State of Croatia.³ Although the majority of the Jews and Roma were actually killed through the camp system in Croatia, this was not the case with the most numerous victims of the Ustasha regime - the Serbs. Out of approximately 350,000 Serbs murdered on the territory of NDH in the war-time period⁴, *only* 47,627, or 13% of all Serbian victims were killed in Jasenovac itself.⁵ The research of the Jasenovac camp system is of great importance, and it is essential for the understanding of ethnic cleansing during the Second World War in Croatia. However, it cannot be the only topos through which we should explain the complexity of the surrounding events. During the summer of 1941, before Jasenovac was even created, around 100,000 Serbs were already killed in the countryside; most of them never saw the gate of any concentration camp, because they were killed in immediate proximity of their homes.⁶

Current scholarship on ethnic cleansing in NDH tends to take into account different forms of mass violence⁷ which were also occurring outside the camp systems. However, insufficient prominence was given to mass violence happening outside the framework of state institutions and party hierarchy. Further distinction should be made between direct state-organized policies and their implementation through state institutions on the one hand, and what I would call wild mass violence or ethnic cleansing on the other.

³ In Croatian Nezavisna Država Hrvatska. From now on I will use the abbreviation NDH when referring to the Independent State of Croatia.

⁴ Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Policy of Forced Religious Conversions, 1941-1942," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (2005), 72.

⁵ Jasenovac Memorial Site, "List of Individual Victims of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp 1941-1945."

⁶ Alexander Korb, "Understanding Ustaša Violence" in: *Journal of Genocide Research* (2010), 5.

⁷ I use the term "mass violence" in a similar way as Christian Gerlach who identified it as a "widespread physical violence against non-combatants, that is, outside of immediate fighting between military or paramilitary personnel." Definition can be found in Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

Comparatively, the closest to the ideal case of state-organized methods of extermination was that of the Nazi policies towards ethnic minorities which they identified as *undesirable*.⁸ The Nazis also experimented with wild methods such as pogroms, the most famous one being the *Kristallnacht* in 1938; however they soon abandoned the endorsement of such *uncontrolled* violence because of the public pressure and risk that these events might get out of hand.⁹ Nonetheless, they provided support and endorsed local auxiliary units in the east, which conducted acts of wild mass violence through pogroms which appeared occasionally in for example the Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states.¹⁰

In NDH, the Ustashe regime simultaneously conducted state-organized ethnic cleansing, and supported grassroots groups which arranged similar pogrom-like acts of mass violence, mainly directed towards the Serbs. These groups came to be known as the Wild Ustashe because they were not formal members of the Ustashe movement, and moreover because of their ruthless methods of murder committed against those who became their victims. Researchers of the Ustashe movement overwhelmingly focused on state-organized methods of conducting ethnic cleansing, somehow avoiding the topic of the Wild Ustashe and wild mass murder. One of the reasons for this is the fact that cases of Wild Ustashe mass violence is under-documented compared to other aspects of the regime-controlled violence.¹¹

Moreover, some scholars think that to claim that there are certain acts of violence which were not directly planned and orchestrated by the official structures of the Ustashe

⁸ Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211.

⁹ *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 284-7.

¹¹ Limited amount of documents is a reoccurring issue regarding the research of grassroots violence in the scholarship of mass violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Christian Gerlach also identified this setback concluding that “popular involvement in mass violence inevitably leaves less of a paper trail” as compared to the state-organized measures. See Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 4.

regime, means to partially diminish the responsibility of the regime itself. On one occasion I was personally warned of the possibility of being called a pro-fascist revisionist historian if I continue dealing with this topic. However, I believe that such arguments are derived from deep misunderstanding of the topic. As I will show in my research, the existence of the Wild Ustashe does not in any way relativize the fact that simultaneously with them, the regime conducted state-organized ethnic cleansing and mass violence for which it is directly responsible. Furthermore, the Ustashe regime itself has to answer for creating the grassroots Wild Ustashe because not only did they allow its existence, they also encouraged their creation in the first months of the regime's existence. Moreover, the Ustashe regime gave them supplies, and offered them protection and assistance throughout the first months of their reign.

The aim of my research is, on a macro level, to show the relation between the state-organized and wild ethnic cleansing. By comparing the two I want to demonstrate which groups were dominantly targeted by one or the other and why. My claim is that these two distinct methods of ethnic cleansing were not in collision, but that they were complementary and worked towards the same goal, but with different means. Secondly, my aim is to investigate how were the Wild Ustashe treated by the regime and what were the attitudes of different factions inside the Ustashe movement towards their practices. Moreover, I will demonstrate under which circumstances and how were the Wild Ustashe created, and what influenced their sudden rise, as well as rapid demise. My research will be focused on the year 1941, when the dynamics between the state-organized and wild ethnic cleansing reached its peak.

The overall aim of my thesis is to demonstrate the complexity of perpetrators and methods in the process of ethnic cleansing in NDH. Moreover, the heteronomy of agents which influenced different policies of ethnic cleansing and mass violence will reveal ideo-

logical and group conflicts within the Ustashe movement. In the analysis of individuals and groups in the Ustashe movement I will be led by scientific inquiry which presupposes the absence of explicit moralistic judgments. With regards to this issue I will be guided by an overall attitude concisely summarized by Timothy Snyder who noted that

To yield to this temptation, to find other people to be inhuman, is to take a step toward, not away from, the Nazi position. To find other people incomprehensible is to abandon the search for understanding, and thus to abandon history.¹²

Theoretical framework

Traditionally, the scholarship on the Holocaust has been divided between scholars who either lean towards the functional, or the intentional approach to the topic. The distinction between these two camps can be best illustrated through the road metaphor. Typical intentionalist would claim that there was a straight road to mass murder, and that what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust was premediated long before the Nazis and other perpetrators came to power. Moreover, they claim that the ideology was decisive in this process with very little alternations from the initial plan which was established long before the Nazis came to power.

In opposition to this view, functionalists claim that the road to the Holocaust, and especially methods employed in it, saw many alternations ranging from initial resettlement plans for the victims, all the way to various ways of murder. Wandering between these different policies and methods of murder did not depend on a preconceived and well defined plan, but on pragmatism and *ad hoc* circumstances. Therefore the functionalist explanation can be described as a twisted road with many curves which eventually ended up with the

¹² Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 400.

intention of total annihilation of the Jewry.¹³ Initially, this distinction was used to describe different approaches regarding the Nazi policies towards the Jews. However, these different approaches can also be employed for describing other cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide happening under different regimes.

In my research I will lean more towards the functional explanation of mass murder and genocide which was conducted upon the Serbs, Jews and Roma in NDH. In my opinion, shaped by the evidence I have acquired, the Ustashe had an overall attitude that Croatia should be ethnically cleansed of the *undesired* minorities, and a consensus on this matter had been reached among the Ustashe elites during the first weeks of their rule in NDH. However, there was no consensus regarding the methods according to which this ethnic cleansing would be conducted. There were different groups inside the Ustashe movement which propagated various solutions to this issue ranging from assimilation to deportation or mass murder. Furthermore, the regime itself fluctuated between these methods depending on the various circumstances which had influenced decision-makers regarding the solving of the Serbian, Jewish and Roma *question(s)*.

According to the functionalist explanation, one has to abandon the idea that the Ustashe were a monolith and static movement. First of all, the ideology of the Ustashe movement was constantly evolving from the period of early 1930s, when the movement was formed, up to the moment when they came to power. Even then, the ideology of the movement was a contested one, and many groups attempted to influence it. Scholars examining the history of the Ustashe movement should not make a mistake of something I would call over-Ustasizing the members of the movement. That someone was a member of the Usta-

¹³ Further elaboration on the issue of functionalism and intentionalism can be found in Christopher Browning, „Nazi Resettlement Policy and the Search for a Solution to the Jewish Question, 1939-1941,“ *The Path to Genocide, Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3-4.

she movement did not mean that he or she completely ascribed to the ideological views held by the Ustashe officials. Moreover, even the high officials did not share the same views regarding the given issues. The fact is that the Ustashe movement was incredibly diverse, split into many factions, which were in direct conflict throughout the existence of NDH.¹⁴ This conflict did not stop only in debates about the ideology or exchange of opinion, but sometimes even escalated to a murder of the Ustashe of an opposite opinion, as I will demonstrate in this research. One of the splits that I will focus on is related to the power struggle between the paramilitarist, or movement-oriented Ustashe, and nation-statist Ustashe.

Numerous scholars dealing with the issue of the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing in NDH wanted to find a single factor to which the whole explanation of why mass murder and genocide happened could be reduced. One of the most famous reductionist theories regarding the ethnic cleansing in NDH was the one which restricted it to a religious conflict. Historians holding such position most often claim that the Ustashe were a clerical-fascist movement trying to create a purely catholic-Croatian state. Some of the authors who think that Catholicism played a major role include Edmund Paris¹⁵, Jonathan Gumz¹⁶, Vladimir Dedijer¹⁷, Gojko Škoro¹⁸ and Jonathan Steinberg¹⁹. Gumz, one of the softest supporters of

¹⁴ Some of these factions were state-oriented as opposed to paramilitarist-oriented Ustashe, pro-German as opposed to pro-Italian, pro-assimilationist in regards to the Serbian *question* as opposed to racist Ustashe, pro-Catholic as opposed to the secular Ustashe. Allegedly there were also conflicts between the groups which clashed based on the region they came from. One of the most evident clashes was between the emigrant Ustashe who, spent their time mainly in Italy before they came to power, and the so called home-grown Ustashe who were active in Yugoslavia during the pre-war period.

¹⁵ Edmund Paris, *Genocide in Satellite Croatia, 1941-1945: A Record of Racial and Religious Persecutions and Massacres* (Chicago: American Institute for Balkan Affairs, 1961).

¹⁶ Jonathan Gumz, "Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia, 1941-1942." *The Historical Journal*, Vol 44, No. 4 (2001), 1015-38.

¹⁷ Vladimir Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican: The Croatian Massacre of the Serbs During the World War II* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992).

¹⁸ Gojko Škoro, *Genocide over the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia: Be Catholic or Die* (Belgrade: Institute of Contemporary History, 2000).

¹⁹ Jonathan Steinberg, "Types of Genocide? Croats, Serbs and Jews, 1941-5," David Caserani, ed., *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994).

such theory claims that the “Ustaša state not only considered itself an avowedly Croatian state, but also a staunchly Catholic state.”²⁰

On the other hand, scholars like Nevenko Bartulin and Mark Biondich made explicit arguments against the view that the Ustashe were religious fanatics, claiming that religious conversion policies were not taken very seriously by some of the Ustashe, but that they were rather a functional compromise than a policy in which they put much faith and dedication. Moreover, these authors emphasize the secular aspects of the regime. I follow Bartulin’s and Biondich’s line of argumentation, since I believe that Catholicism was important only as one of the many identifiers of the completely secular aim - nationalism. Catholicism in itself was not important as a religious practice to the regime, but only as a way of expressing national affiliation. Moreover, Catholicism was not the only religion through which Croatdom could be expressed; the same could have been done through Islam or Protestantism. I disagree with the argument that Orthodox religion itself was targeted for destruction, because Orthodox religious minorities such as the Russians, Armenians and Romanians were not persecuted. But Serbian-Orthodoxy was exclusively targeted *only* because it had a political function of serving as a national identifier in the eyes of the Ustashe.

Theories which aim to reduce the causes of mass violence and genocide to a single factor such as ideology or religion are being largely abandoned because they can rarely answer the complexity of the given phenomena. This was caused by the recently increased awareness of multiplicity of actors and variety of different motives which had driven perpetrators to commit mass violence, ranging from economic, social, psychological, and personal to ideological ones. This fact led the historian Christian Gerlach to conclude that we can

²⁰ Gumz, “Mass Violence in Croatia,” 1025.

only look for “overlap of attitudes and interests” which banded perpetrators together, however, reduction to a single cause explanation of mass violence is deemed to fail.²¹

Following the latest trends in the field of Holocaust and genocide research, some scholars of the Ustashe movement recently attempted to unravel the complexity and multiplicity of perpetrators in the mass violence appearing in NDH. Historian Alexander Korb recognized that currently prevailing generic narrative of “genocide over the Serbs, Jews and Gypsies” does not recognize substantial differences in the persecution of each of these minorities.²² Moreover, such narrative fails to point out the variety of different motives which drove the Ustashe in their murderous endeavor. Korb makes interesting remarks by comparing policies and violence applied towards different ethnic minorities by the Ustashe. Although he tends to include the perpetrators on the local level, and mentions collaboration of population which was outside of the movement’s hierarchy, unfortunately he does not enter an in depth discussion about them.

Tomislav Dulić, a historian affiliated with the Uppsala University, also contributed to the field by comparing methods of violence applied by different groups in NDH. Like Korb, Dulić also emphasized important differences in how the Ustashe approached their victims in both ideological and practical terms. He noticed that the Jews and Roma were identified in racial terms, and the Serbs in ethnic and political ones. However, he does not give us a detailed genesis on how and why this came into being. Dulić should receive more recognition for introducing a model of exercising violence from above and below in NDH. In order to bring forth a fuller picture, Dulić uses interdisciplinary approach, combining psychology and sociology in explaining the variety of motives which drove perpetrators on different levels. Violence from above was mostly influenced by ideology and military inter-

²¹ Gerlach, *Extremely violent societies*, 2-3.

²² Korb, *Understanding Ustasha Violence*, 10-11.

ests, however on a lower level there were multiple motives which drove different agents, but economic reasons were the predominant ones. Dulić focused on the comparison between the violence committed by the Ustashe and Chetniks in order to demonstrate how violence from below took place. Although he makes very important points, he only briefly mentions the Wild Ustashe and does not expand on the matter.²³ He recognizes the multi-causality of the mass violence on both higher and lower levels. However, he did not establish clear difference between the regular and Wild Ustashe. Dulić does provide some reasoning behind stopping the wild mass murder by the end of 1941, but accredits it only to the factors outside of the Ustashe movement. One of the biggest flaws in his interpretation is the fact that he did not take into account the dynamics in the movement itself, and different conceptions between many interest groups in the movement. Also, in comparing mass violence of the Ustashe and Chetniks he diminished the role of the Wild Ustashe in committing uncontrolled arbitrary violence, attributing it mainly to the Chetnik formations. For example in the paper titled *Ethnic Violence in Occupied Yugoslavia: Mass killing from above and below*, Dulić overstated the role of the state power wielded by the Ustashe, and identified this factor as a key concept which differentiates the Ustashe from Chetniks. Although reliance on the state apparatus did have a key role in genocide over the Jews and Roma, it had a far lesser role concerning the mass murder of Serbs, at least during the first months in power, when uncontrolled mass murder committed by the Ustashe reached its peak.²⁴ In another paper he claimed that the Chetnik violence was more reminiscent of a pre-modern destruction process, while diminishing the same characteristics appearing with the Ustashe. More-

²³ Tomislav Dulić, Mass killing in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945: A Case for Comparative Research, A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide: Critical concepts in historical studies* (I-VI), vol. 4., *Twentieth century imperial genocide: The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany* (London and New York, Routledge.:2006), 260.

²⁴ Tomislav Dulić, "Ethnic Violence in Occupied Yugoslavia: Mass Killing from Above and Below," in D. Djokić and J. Ker-Lindsay, *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia: Key Issues and Controversies* (London: Routledge, 2010).

over, he puts an emphasis on the Ustashe division of the killing process into distinct phases, which might be true for the Jews and Roma, but it was not true for thousands of Serbs who were killed in a wild manner.²⁵

Methodology and source analysis

This thesis is based on a combination of secondary and primary sources. There is plenty of secondary literature covering the topic of NDH, the Ustashe movement and genocide which was the result of the two. The existing literature puts an overwhelming focus on the state-organized measures of ethnic cleansing and persecution of ethnic minorities. As an outcome, published works on the Ustashe cover the empirical side of the state-organized measures in detail. Consequently, I will heavily rely on published secondary works in treating the policies, legislature and state institutions. Moreover, I will use published books complementary to primary sources by using the quoted primary materials in the existing literature.

Wild ethnic cleansing and the Wild Ustashe as key agents in this process have not been researched in length or detail. Therefore the reliance on primary sources such as newspapers, documents and memoirs is going to be essential for my central chapter covering this topic.

Slavko Kvaternik, the only field-marshal in NDH, and a prominent member of the Ustashe movement, is one of the rare Ustashe officials who explicitly addressed the issue of the Wild Ustashe in his memoirs written during the time of his imprisonment after the Second World War. As is the case with any piece of memoirs, Kvaternik is highly subjective and apologetic in his writing. He attempts to show himself in the role of someone who was

²⁵ Dulić, *Mass killing in the Independent State of Croatia*, 267.

used by Pavelić, and ultimately that he was innocent and led by idealism. He attacks Pavelić and his closest circle as the sole people responsible for all misdeeds, which is an illusion because Kvaternik himself signed orders under which discrimination and mass murder were made possible. However, certain parts of his memoirs could be considered valuable for researchers of the power struggle inside the Ustashe movement, and of the Wild Ustashe themselves, whom Kvaternik mentions in various passages. Kvaternik gave a lengthy description of how the Wild Ustashe were supported and sponsored by the highest circles of the regime, and how they entered into a conflict with the structures of the regular army which he was the head of.²⁶

Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, German military attaché in Zagreb during the war, led a diary in which he wrote his experiences and opinions on various issues regarding NDH and the Ustashe movement. His memoirs were published in Croatian recently, in 2013, under the title *Zapisi iz NDH* (Notes from NDH).²⁷ Horstenau was highly critical towards the Ustashe practices in general, particularly towards the arbitrariness of usage of violence and wild persecution of ethnic minorities. Horstenau was primarily led by German military interests and therefore saw wild ethnic cleansing as one of the key reasons for rebellion of the Partisans and Chetnik resistance groups on the territory of NDH. In his diary, Horstenau writes on numerous intrigues on the highest level, regarding policies of ethnic cleansing. One of the most interesting ones were Hitler's remarks and blessings given to Pavelić regarding the murderous and discriminatory policies in NDH.

The main limitation of the topic of the Wild Ustashe and wild ethnic cleansing is the dispersion of documents across different archives. Documents on the history of NDH are

²⁶ Nada Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika: Sjećanja Slavka Kvaternika* [Field-Marshal and Politics: Memoirs of Slavko Kvaternik] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1997).

²⁷ Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, *Zapisi iz NDH* [Notes from NDH] (Zagreb: Disput, 2013).

scattered in different cities and states, for example Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, even the documents in a single archive are often vaguely classified and unorganized. For the purpose of my research I visited the Croatian State Archive in Zagreb in which I focused on the documents of the Ministry of Interior of NDH (fond 223, boxes 301-303), the Ustashe Secret Service (fond 248, boxes 1-7) and Presidency of the Government of NDH (fond 212, box 1). The most useful documents regarding the activities of the Wild Ustashe can be found in the Ministry of Interior regarding almost daily reports on the political and military actions in specific areas. Although the reports are very brief, they are illustrative on how the Wild Ustashe operated, how they were recruited and in how high numbers.

Newspapers are an indispensable source when dealing with the topic of the Ustashe movement. In my research I relied on the biggest newspapers in NDH, *Hrvatski narod* (Croatian people).²⁸ Through the analysis of articles in the newspapers I focused on three elements; firstly, the propaganda and speeches regarding ethnic cleansing, secondly, the measures, laws and warnings issued regarding the discrimination and persecution of the Serbs, Jews and Roma, and finally the treatment and representation of the Wild Ustashe. It is particularly useful to see how different authors in the newspapers projected their ideological views on the issue of the Wild Ustashe, and consequently revealed their images of how the Ustashe movement was supposed to be organized and how it should function.

²⁸ *Hrvatski narod: glasilo Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* [Croatian people: newspapers of the Croatian Ustashe movement] were first published in 1939 before the Ustashe came to power. They were banned a couple of years in Yugoslavia, and after the Ustashe came to power they became the largest newspapers in the Independent State of Croatia. All issues of these newspapers can be found in the National and University Library in Zagreb and also in the Croatian State Archive library.

Structure

This research is going to be divided into four chapters. In the first chapter I will address the issue of genesis of the racial and ethnic hatred inside the Ustashe movement, since its formation until the implementation of the first policies and actions. My claim is that the Ustashe did not have a monolithic ideology, but a dynamic one, which evolved during time, influenced by ideology transfer from other fascist movements, most prominently the German National-Socialism and Italian Fascism. Furthermore, I will examine the initial Ustashe rhetoric regarding ethnic cleansing in NDH. Afterwards, I will address the issue of consensus among the Ustashe elites regarding the overall attitude that an ethnically cleansed Croatia is among the ultimate goals of the movement's ideological framework.

In the second chapter I will focus on the state-organized actions and processes directed against the Serbs, Jews and Roma. The focus will be on policies carried into effect by the state institutions, and the ways in which they were implemented, as well as which instruments were essential in this process. One of the key objectives of this chapter is to identify deviations in the treatment of different ethnic minorities, determined as *undesirables*. My argument is that the factors which determined the discrepancy in policies are connected to ideology, existing infrastructure and the sheer size of targeted groups. The Jews and Roma were identified in racial terms, implemented into legislature which treated every single member of these groups equally, at least in principle. This was possible because the population of the Jews and Roma combined was around 60,000-70,000. The existing concentration camp infrastructure could *consume* such an amount of people who made less than 1% of the total population. On the other hand, the Serbs were, at least officially, not identified in racial terms, but as an ethno-political element which was considered hostile. This vagueness of how to solve the "Serbian question," and what is the official state position towards them

was the root for the variety of policies employed towards them. Moreover, the issue of size of the Serbian population was also a decisive factor, since Serbs numbered 1,85 million, accounting for 26% of the population, further complicating this matter.²⁹

The third chapter of this thesis aims at closing the existing research gap, since it is focused on the complexity of actors in the process of ethnic cleansing. Moreover, no systematic research has been conducted on the Wild Ustashe, who were one of the most prominent agents in the process of wild ethnic cleansing. I will analyze multiple factors which led to the creation of the Wild Ustashe groups, such as the image of the ideal Croat and the expectations given by the regime, the permission to kill, indirectly given through the Ustashe propaganda, economic motives, vengeful motives and the influence of lower ranking Ustashe in this process. The appearance of the Wild Ustashe caused a split inside the Ustashe movement between those who supported their activities, considering them to be an integral part of the Ustashe movement, and those who thought that the state should have a monopoly on violence.

In the fourth chapter I will discuss how the trend of wild ethnic cleansing lost its impetus, and how the Ustashe elites decided to increasingly rely on state-organized measures against the Serbs, previously mostly affected by arbitrary violence exercised by the Wild Ustashe. The question of creating more advanced camp systems, especially Jasenovac, as a necessary precondition for this shift will also be addressed. Finally, I will conclude the last chapter with the discussion on the aftermath of the Ustashe regime in NDH.

²⁹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Stanovništvo i gospodarska snaga naše države: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska u brojkama.” no. 96, 19 May 1941, 5. See also Bartulin, *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 257.

Chapter I. Twisted road to ethnic cleansing: from genesis to implementation of policies towards the Serbs, Jews and Roma (1930-1941)

The birth of the Ustashe movement

Ante Pavelić, the future leader of the Ustashe movement, started his political career as a member of the nationalistic Croatian Party of Rights.³⁰ In his early political activity he was a legalist who ascribed to the view that his party should work on the unification of all Croatian lands and subsequently on the independence of Croatia from the domination of any foreign power, realised “with all legal means.”³¹ Croatia, at the time was undergoing dramatic changes in its political life. After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which Croatia was a part of, in 1918 it joined the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Slovenes and Croats under the crown of the Serbian dynasty of Karađorđević.³² Nationalists, following a long ideological tradition of arguing for Croatian independence, were not happy with such political development.

Increasing tensions existed between the Croatian and Serbian nationalists dating back to the nineteenth century, when both nationalistic movements were developing simultaneously. Due to the fact that the Croats and Serbs shared comparatively similar ethnic traits, like language, they were eligible, from the standpoint of nationalists, for assimilating the other nation into their own. As a matter of fact, both nationalistic projects of greater Croatia and Serbia were to include if not total, then a significant portion of each other’s ter-

³⁰ Hrvatska stranka prava.

³¹ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret: Od nastanka do travnja 1941. Godine* [The Ustashe and home-defense movement: from its foundations to April of 1941] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2007), 165. Pavelić repeated a similar statement again in 1927 claiming that he will use *all legal means possible, so that Croatian people can radically rejuvenate through the upcoming of Croatian independence*. This quote can be found in Finka Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1977), 16.

³² Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was the official name of the state from 1918, and it changed its name to Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.

ritory. This was most evident in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on which both nationalist movements had pretensions.³³ This caused a serious distrust and conflict among nationalists on both sides, which was transferred into the newly formed Kingdom.³⁴ Pavelić, like many other nationalists, was following the traditional nationalistic argument that Croatian independence was the best solution to the “Croatian Question.”

After Croatia joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the majority of Croatian parties were not satisfied with the status of Croatia in the new state. The Croatian lands did not receive political autonomy, nor was the country organized into a federation, as was assumed it would. Moreover, the Croatians did not participate in the creation of the new constitution, therefore the state lacked democratic legitimacy, at least from the standpoint of the majority of the Croatian population. Its politicians had the same belief, which became an issue that continued to burden the Croatian-Serbian relations throughout the existence of the state. Historian Jill Irvine claims that in the context of Yugoslavia the “failure to address the Croat question effectively undermined the viability of the democratic system and ultimately resulted in the imposition of an authoritarian political order.”³⁵

The crisis escalated in 1928 with the assassination of Stjepan Radić,³⁶ the most popular Croatian politician and one of the most prominent critics of the regime.³⁷ Radić and his associates were shot by a Serbian nationalist Puniša Račić, which further deepened the

³³ Bogdan Krizman. *Pavelić i Ustaše* [Pavelić and the Ustashe] (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 14.

³⁴ For more details see Jill A. Irvine, *The Croat Question: Partisan Politics in the Formation of the Yugoslav Socialist State* (Boulder, Col. : Westview Press, 1993). See also Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia: A History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999). Also Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For the interpretation of the conflict between the Serbian and Croatian nationalists, from the perspective of Serbian historiography, see Vasilije Dj. Krestić, *Through Genocide to a Greater Croatia* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1998). Some measures of precaution should be implemented while using this book, due to political bias of the author.

³⁵ Irvine, *The Croat Question*, 36.

³⁶ Stjepan Radić (1871-1928) was one of the most dominant Croatian politicians in the first third of the twentieth century. He evolved politically from a complete refusal to accept the Serbian dynasty and the union with the Kingdom of Serbia, but, later on he acknowledged the existing state of affairs and tried to operate inside the framework of the kingdom. Nonetheless he was a life-long supporter of the increase of political autonomy of Croatian lands. Irvine, *The Croat Question*, 40-45.

³⁷ Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia: A History*, 120.

tensions between the Serbs and Croats. Masses came out to the streets to protest against the government and the King himself. Faced with serious political turmoil, King Alexander decided to introduce a royal dictatorship in 1929 and banned all parties with national characteristics, hoping he would quell the rising ethnic conflict, and increase stability in such a manner.³⁸ However, the dictatorship itself only expanded the crisis and radicalized it, because it mostly used methods of violence to settle political problems. According to certain estimates, between 1929 and 1933 there were 328 political assassinations initiated by the regime, while other estimates claim that the number could easily be 600.³⁹ Moreover, many more were imprisoned, tortured or wounded because of their political attitudes. Under such circumstances, in 1929, Pavelić, the “rising star” of the nationalist movement, decided to emigrate with his associates because he was afraid for his life.⁴⁰

After he left the country, and cooperated with Macedonian separatists, he was condemned to death in *in absentia* in 1929, which meant he could never return to Yugoslavia or he would be arrested and shot for treason.⁴¹ This event had immense consequences on Pavelić’s political development. Pavelić ultimately settled in Italy and decided to abandon the legalist approach to politics; instead, he turned to terroristic means in the struggle for establishment of NDH. In addition to his conviction to death, Pavelić probably ascribed to the view that the regime lost all its legitimacy after the murder of Radić and many other Croatian nationalists.

Orientation towards terrorism was a major turn in Pavelić’s political life, in which he unquestionably radicalized his ideology and accepted the means of violence as a legitimate way of expressing political ideals. Led by the idea that Croatian independence could not be

³⁸ Irvine, *The Croat Question*, 45.

³⁹ Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 215.

⁴⁰ Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* [History of the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 1994), 32.

⁴¹ Krizman, *Pavelić i Ustaše*, 59-60.

accomplished through democratic or parliamentary means, he decided to form an armed group of nationalists, who would attempt to destroy the Yugoslav regime through armed struggle. This is how the idea of formation of the Ustashe movement came into being. The Ustashe movement was created in 1930 as an extreme militant wing of the Croatian nationalist movement, or at least it saw itself as such.⁴²

The Ustashe as radical, militant and organic nationalists

From its immediate beginning, the Ustashe movement was focused on the struggle against the Serbian ruling elites, but not the Serbs as a group *per se*.⁴³ However, the Ustashe started generalizing the image of the Serbian elites fairly quickly, and to ascribe it to the Serbs as an ethnic group. Already in 1932, Pavelić claimed that all the Serbs think in the same way as the regime in Belgrade, noting that if there is anyone who thinks that there are Serbs who do not think in the same way, that person “has not learned anything.”⁴⁴ In addition to the increase of anti-Serbianism, the movement was becoming increasingly ethnocentric; it did not only wish for the formation of the independent state of Croatia, but started emphasizing the purity of the Croatian blood. In the Principles of the Ustashe movement, published in 1933, Pavelić proclaimed that “in the [future] Independent State of Croatia, no one but Croats by blood and heredity can decide about national and state affairs. In the same manner, none of the foreign nations and states can decide about the future of the Croatian people.”⁴⁵ Increasing interpretation of politics through emphasis on blood, and further exclusionist statements regarding the Serbs as an ethnic group, instead of a sole focus on the Serbian

⁴² Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 112.

⁴³ Ibid, 130.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Krizman, *Pavelić i Ustaše*, 118.

political elites, means that we can look at the Ustashe movement as an organic nationalist movement.

A historian and sociologist Michael Mann noted that there are three shared beliefs which characterize organic nationalists. The first is the belief in an enduring national character, soul or spirit, distinguishable from that of other nations. The second is the conviction that they possess a right to a state, which is an ultimate expression of the first belief. Finally, organic nationalists think that they have the right to exclude out-groups with different characteristics than their own, because these groups only weaken their nation.⁴⁶ The Ustashe never missed an opportunity to emphasize the Croatian right to form an independent state. If we only look at the Principles of the Ustashe movement we can observe that out of seventeen points which summarize their political program, seven are directly pointing to the historical and ethnic rights for the *resurrection* of the Croatian state.⁴⁷ Moreover, they believed that they deserve this because Croats are a separate ethnic community, different from all the others. The Ustashe strongly emphasized that Croats have been living on these lands, where they intended to create a state, for the last 1400 years, trying to prove ethnic continuity. Finally, the Ustashe maintained the belief that the reason why they did not gain independence was other ethnic groups, most prominently the Serbs, who were always working against them. This point is best illustrated in a statement given by the nationalist Ante Valenta who, in 1935, claimed that “on countless occasions the orthodox elements [Serbs] worked (...) intentionally against the interest of Croatia.”⁴⁸ Blaming the Serbs, and later Jews, for the failure of Croatian independence fuelled the Ustashe belief that these groups were actually among the key reasons for all the problems surrounding Croatian statehood. Through the period of radicalization of the movement, which will be described later on, the Ustashe

⁴⁶ Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 64.

⁴⁷ Krizman, *Pavelić i Ustaše*, 117-3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

came to believe that by the removal of these groups, all the social and political problems of Croats could be solved. Therefore, the Ustashe fulfilled all the necessary conditions for being classified as organic nationalists. Being constituted as such, they formed one of the pre-conditions which led them to undertake policies of ethnic cleansing once they gained power in NDH, during 1941.

Another important point in the pre-war development of the Ustashe movement, with tremendous influence on its war-time policies, is the continuous emphasis on the cult of violence. Violence itself was the key part of the Ustashe ideology from its immediate formation. Since one of the key objectives of the Ustashe was the *resurrection* of NDH through terrorist means, violence was the essence of the movement's existence. In February 1932, Ante Pavelić wrote that “knife, revolver and bombs... are the ideals which will return the fruits of the land to the peasant, bread to the worker, and freedom to Croatia.”⁴⁹ It seems that a further reason for the emphasis on violence was that the Ustashe thought there was an existing stereotype among the Serbs in depicting Croats as pacifists. The Ustashe wanted to radically change this perception. Mladen Lorković, a prominent Ustasha and later the Minister of Foreign and Internal Affairs, wrote in 1934 that “a few years ago the Balkan rotten mob told us (Croats) that we are cowards and peacemakers, that we bark, but do not bite. Today, when they do not know when and where the next deadly Ustashe bomb might explode (...), today they are silent.”⁵⁰ The idea that violence can resolve any sort of political and social problems is something the Ustashe insisted on throughout their existence.

Therefore, to sum up, there are three persistent and authentic motives in the Ustashe ideology, insistence on the creation of the independent state of Croatia, monopoly of Croats by blood in the Croatian political arena, and the idea that these two political goals can be

⁴⁹ Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 244.

achieved through violent means. Pavelić did not further tire himself with authentic and profound development of movement's ideology claiming in 1937 that:

The Ustashe movement was not created for the purpose of universal ideological maxims, but as a revolutionary movement for the liberation of the Croatian people. Because of that it is not the aim of this movement to waste time on the development of ideological questions, but to work pragmatically in the struggle for our goal.... The most important thing is the creation of the Independent State of Croatia stretching over its historical and ethnical territory. Until that is fulfilled, it is completely illusory to ask for ideological and social accomplishments.⁵¹

Pavelić did not hold this attitude towards ideological questions accidentally, but as a means of political pragmatism. By not giving a firm ideological framework he may have hoped to recruit as many members from different social levels as possible. Subsequently, the ideological gap which had occurred was getting increasingly filled with fascist ideology. However, this was not an uncommon phenomenon, nor one that was unique in the Ustashe movement. A historian George Mosse, who extensively dealt with fascism, noticed that fascist movements absorb significant amount of ideas from the mainstream, popular thought, and they redevelop these ideas in accordance with their activism.⁵²

At the time of the formation of the Ustashe movement, and the years in which they developed their ideology, Europe saw the emergence of two very dynamic movements, the German Nazism and Italian Fascism. The Ustashe aims of political and territorial revisionism, emphasis on violence, radicalism and nationalism were corresponding to the aims of these two fascist regimes. Naturally, the Ustashe leaned towards these two regimes and started extensively borrowing their ideologies, especially from the German Nazism during

⁵¹ Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 153. See also Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske*, 50.

⁵² George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism*. (New York: H. Fertig, 1999.), 28.

the second half of 1930's. The Ustashe gradually adopted three different ideological conceptions from Nazism: acceptance of the "Jewish Question," racism and acceptance of the *New Order* politics. The adoption of the Nazi rhetoric in the Ustashe movement was evident already in 1936, when Ante Pavelić sent a memorandum titled *The Croatian Question* to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 28 October 1936. Pavelić tried to interpret the political aims of the Ustashe movement through extensive usage of antisemitism and anti-communism.⁵³ Racism started slowly, but steadily entering the Ustashe movement since 1933, when Nazism came to power. But, from 1936, the Ustashe started relying on it extensively. They started identifying themselves with the Gothic theory of Croatian descent, according to which the Croats were not of Slavic ancestry but of Gothic.⁵⁴

This claim had a twofold role: first, it was another argument that was supposed to support the idea that the Croats were completely different from Serbs, therefore they should have a state of their own; second that as decedents of Goths, Croats are in fact Aryans and thus belong to the Germanic world. By claiming that they were Aryans, among other things, the Ustashe accepted the Nazi type of racism and their racial hierarchy. Out of this 'Aryan' racial myth came two other major ideological developments in the Ustashe movement; by accepting that they were of Germanic descent, the Ustashe embraced the *New Order* politics. This was manifested in several different ways, primarily in accepting an uncompromising fight against Communism, future rearrangement of borders on the European continent and most importantly, accepting that there existed the "Jewish Question" which had to be resolved.

⁵³ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*, 241.

⁵⁴ Mario Jareb, "Jesu li Hrvati postali Goti? Odnos Ustaša i vlasti Nezavisne Države Hrvatske: prema neslavenskim teorijama o porijeklu Hrvata [Did Croats become Goths? The relation of the the Ustashe and the government of the Independent State of Croatia towards non-Slavic theories of Croatian descent]," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 40, No.3 (2008), 874.

From that moment on, the Ustashe intensified their accusations against the Jews and in one of the proclamations in 1940, Pavelić stated that “one of the biggest and most obvious injustices, which was put into practice by England and France in its Versailles dictate, was the creation of unnatural and abomination state (Yugoslavia), which was created first and foremost by the international Jews...”⁵⁵ Pavelić also made accusations against Britain and France, saying that they were ruled by “capitalist politics of international Jewry.”⁵⁶ By acceptance of the *New Order*, Pavelić also started criticizing and refuting the democratic system of government and identified himself with totalitarian systems of Fascism and Nazism. By discussing the defeat of France, he noted that “today, when England and France alongside the Jewish democracy are beaten..., Germany and Italy are to decide about the new order in Europe.”⁵⁷

The period of fascization of the movement, taking place in the second half of the 1930s also marks the period of intense radicalization of the movement. The Ustashe found blessing and reliance in other fascist powers, and were encouraged to proceed with their radicalism by observing actions of these fascist regimes. The Ustashe furthermore sharpened their organic view on nationalism, and put an even stronger emphasis on usage of violence in solving social and political problems. Already in 1940, certain diplomats were speculating that if they come to power, the Ustashe would begin with a bloody campaign of ethnic cleansing. For example, Galeazzo Ciano wrote in his diary on 21 January 1940, that an informant, Josip Bombelles, told him that if the Ustashe undertake an uprising in Croatia, “the Serbs will be struck everywhere and implacably disposed of by the Croats.”⁵⁸ After the Ustashe took power in 1941, the same informer, Josip Bombelles was imprisoned, and later

⁵⁵ As quoted in Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*, 332.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 333.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, 1946), 199.

killed by the Ustashe in a concentration camp during 1942, fulfilling his prediction in the most tragic way.⁵⁹

The Ustashe discourse of ethnic cleansing

The Ustashe movement came to power in April 1941 as a result of the Axis' attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. NDH was formed on the territory embracing both the historical Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In terms of territory, if we look at its ethnic composition, the Ustashe were given a far greater territory than belonged to them. The newly created state had a total population of 6,996,729, but those identified as Croats (including 750,000 Bosnian Muslims) by the regime were numbering only 4,817,100 (68%). Serbs were a major minority numbering 1,848,400 (26%).⁶⁰ Other important minorities in the eyes of the Ustashe ideologues were the Jews who numbered 40,000 and about 20,000 Roma.⁶¹ As we can see the Jews and Roma combined accounted for less than 1% of the total population.

After the Ustashe came to power, they found themselves in a peculiar international situation which they could not have foreseen only a couple of months earlier. Yugoslavia, their *archenemy*, ceased to exist. Moreover, no new Serbian state came into existence, because Serbia was under the German Military Administration.⁶² This opened a significant maneuvering space for the Ustashe policies towards the Serbs in Croatia, because they could not rely on any sort of protection either in the domestic or international sphere. The Jews and Roma found themselves in an even worse situation, not only that they could not rely on

⁵⁹ List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac Concentration Camp, Jasenovac memorial site. <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=7618>, last accessed on 2 June 2015.

⁶⁰ *Hrvatski narod*, "Stanovništvo i gospodarska snaga naše države: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska u brojkama," no. 96, 19 May 1941, 5.

⁶¹ Nevenko Bartulin, "The Ideology of Nation and Race: The Croatian Ustasha Regime and Its Policies Toward Minorities in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945" (Phd. diss., University of New South Wales, 2006), 257.

⁶² Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 175-7.

any neighboring nation, but the immediate international situation was extremely stimulative towards negative policies aimed at these two ethnic minorities. The Ustashe elites considered this unique setup as a historical opportunity to solve primarily the Serbian, but also the Jewish and Roma *questions*.

These international circumstances further encouraged the Ustashe to stick to their goal of creating an ethnically homogenous territory. Michael Mann noted that in order for ethnic cleansing to take place, a group conducting it has to believe that it has an overwhelming power in their hands, otherwise it would not have the courage or means to even think about it.⁶³ If we follow this line of argumentation, then the international situation surrounding the Ustashe regime was not only a favorable circumstance, but a necessary precondition in order for the Ustashe to accept the policy of ethnic cleansing.

It seems like the issue of ethnic cleansing has been openly discussed by the Ustashe elites from the moment they took power. Inflation of the statements regarding the issue appeared in the press, peaking in June and July. Such an enormous amount of propaganda in such a short period of time could hardly be just a coincidence; therefore, it might be that the Ustashe were preparing the ground for ethnic cleansing among the population. Indoctrination regarding ethnic cleansing had to be conducted to assure the support of the population. The case was that the radical elite clearly wanted to create an atmosphere eligible for ethnic cleansing to take place.

What is especially striking in case of the Ustashe discourse on ethnic cleansing is the sheer number of statements confirming it, and such a short time in which they were all expressed. Moreover the statements were given by the highest officials of the Ustashe regime, most often by ministers and governors. Milovan Žanić one of the most prominent *home-*

⁶³ Mann, *The Dark Side of the Democracy*, 6.

grown Ustashe, immediately took the highest positions in the first government of NDH. He was appointed president of the Lawmaking committee.⁶⁴ As a high government official he gave a speech to the Ustasha sympathizers in which he stated that “after everything that happened, we know that they [Serbs] will never wish us any good, nor will they think well of us. We, the Ustashe, know that until the Serbian question is solved, there will be troubles in this country of ours.” Moreover he concluded that “we, the Ustashe, always said that heads will fall of those who bother us, because now we are making history for centuries and centuries [to come].”⁶⁵ Although Žanić did not openly use the term *cleansing*, he clearly implies it in his statement. By proclaiming that all Serbs are a menace and the fact that the heads of all those who endanger Croatia had to fall, Žanić actually implied that all the Serbs had to be killed. Moreover, his conception on who was selected for ethnic cleansing did not stop only on Serbs, but it further included the Jews and Roma. Žanić clearly showed this when he signed many anti-Jewish and anti-Roma laws, such as the infamous race laws issued on 30 April 1941.⁶⁶ More importantly, Žanić did not think that ethnic cleansing is a political necessity, as some other Ustashe tried to justify it. He thought that ethnic cleansing was a historical mission of the Ustashe. Žanić did not hide his opinion on how they planned to conduct ethnic cleansing; he stated that “there is no method we are not ready to use, to make this country really Croatian, and to cleanse it of the Serbs. Moreover, we do not keep this a secret; this is the policy of our state.”⁶⁷

Another high official, Aleksandar Seitz, holding the position of the chief-secretary of presidency of the Croatian government, in a public speech noted to the common-folk not to

⁶⁴ Zdravko Dizdar et al., ed. *Tko je tko u NDH* [Who is who in the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 433.

⁶⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, Urediti ćemo ovu državu kako propisuju Ustaška načela, broj 112, 06.06.1941, str. 3.

⁶⁶ Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 433.

⁶⁷ Bogdan Krizman, *NDH između Mussolinija i Hitlera* [NDH between Hitler and Mussolini] (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 124.

be afraid because “the Jews and Serbs, nor those who may have served them, will never come back. The Serbs and Jews cannot exist anymore, nor will they, that is guaranteed by the Croatian military and the Croatian Ustashe.”⁶⁸ He acknowledged that the Ustashe accepted no compromise regarding this issue and that the only possible outcome was a complete eradication of the Jews and Serbs on the territory of NDH.

It is important to note that although the Serbs were not identified in racial terms by the regime, many in the Ustashe movement continued to see them as a foreign racial element. This is best illustrated in a statement given by Viktor Gutić, a Ustashe high-official who, while speaking at a funeral, pointed at the death-coffin of a fallen Ustashe and said that “this is an answer to those who were weak and intervened on behalf of some Serbs and asked for their protection.” He continued to say that “the Serbs do not deserve any consideration, because they belong to a criminal species.”⁶⁹ Gutić’s statement represents the opinion of the radical wing within the Ustashe movement which was identifying the Serbs exclusively in racial terms, calling them a species.⁷⁰ According to such a view, Serbs had to disappear solely through physical annihilation, either through deportations or mass murder. In addition to statements like these, there were plenty of articles published in the Ustashe newspapers, which ascribed to the same attitudes, but authors were rarely signed. For example, in one of such articles it is claimed that

We, the Ustashe, are going until the end. We have said and wrote this so many times, but still, some criminals try to influence some Ustashe officials here and there, so they would soften up,..., but they do not know us yet,..., there is no lovely face, big

⁶⁸ *Hrvatski narod*, “Veliki govor prof. Seitza,” no. 130, 24 June 1941.

⁶⁹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Zločinačka pasmina,” no. 147, 11 July 1941, 4.

⁷⁰ Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 145.

Jewish nose nor fat wallet,..., no threat can stop us, we only know one way, and that is the way forward, always further, always to the end.⁷¹

The Ustashe did not put any effort, at least during the first months of their reign, to hide their intentions towards the Serbs and Jews. They were openly discussing the wishes of the regime in the press. In an article, framed in thick black frame so it could dominate the whole page it is announced that “we can count on the fingers of a hand, the days which are left until the Croatian territory will be cleansed in detail of remains of the Chetniks and of our century-old enemies.” The article refers to total cleansing of the Serbian population.⁷²

The minister of foreign affairs, Mladen Lorković, contributed to the induction of the murderous atmosphere by saying that the “Croatian nation has to purify itself of all the elements which are disastrous, foreign and alien to it, of those who decimate its healthy forces, of those who, throughout the decades and centuries, pushed it from one evil into another. And those are our Serbs and Jews.”⁷³ However, not all the Ustashe agreed on how exactly ethnic cleansing was supposed to be carried out. For example Mirko Puk,⁷⁴ in a speech in July 1941, said that there is an old saying: “either banish yourself, or bow to us. But I say: either remove yourself from our country on your own, or we will force you out.”⁷⁵ The minister of economy, Lovro Sučić, probably represents the softest line among the Ustashe elite; he declared in June 1941 that the Ustashe “do not want a bloody cleansing,..., but Serbs do have to move out.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Bez mudrijašenja,” no. 173, 06 August 1941, 4.

⁷² *Hrvatski narod*, “Srbi su protiv hrvata” no. 148, 12 July 1941, 7.

⁷³ Krizman, *NDH između Mussolinija i Hitlera*, 124.

⁷⁴ Mirko Puk (1884-1945), the first Minister of justice of NDH. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 333-4.

⁷⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, “Dokladnik Mile Budak o dužnostima svakog Hrvata,” 7 July 1941, 3.

⁷⁶ Filip Škiljan. “Teror ustaškog režima nad srpskim stanovništvom na području kotareva Vrbovsko, Delnice i Ogulin u proljeće i ljeto 1941. godine [Terror of the Ustashe regime over the Serbian populace on the area of Vrbovsko, Delnice and Ogulin counties during spring and summer of 1941].” *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest*, 43, no.1 (2011), 351.

The inflation of statements and hate-speech against ethnic minorities extensively filled the newspapers during the spring and summer of 1941. Judging by the high-profile of members who were giving these statements, most prominently from the highest circles, such as the ministerial one, shows that there existed a consensus within the Ustashe elite regarding this issue. Although most of the statements were directed towards the Serbs, Jews were also very often mentioned. However, antisemitic articles were often published in the newspapers, therefore the Ustashe elite might have thought that direct emphasis on the resolution of the Jewish question was not as necessary, as was the Serbian one. In any case, when the consensus on ethnic cleansing was reached, the next step was the indoctrination of the population in order to assure their, at least relative support.

Chapter II. State Organized Ethnic Cleansing in the Independent State of Croatia

The “Jewish Question”

The Ustashe made a clear distinction between the Jews and Roma who were identified in racial terms, and the Serbs who were identified in ethno-political ones. This distinction fundamentally determined how the state would treat them. Those identified in racial terms saw a detailed and thorough involvement of the state apparatus over the future course of their lives. By implementing the package of race laws on 30 April, only twenty days after they took power, the Ustashe made a precise definition of who was perceived as a Jew or Roma.⁷⁷ As a consequence, virtually any treatment of the Jews and Roma in NDH went through state institutions and was more or less universal, having the same consequences for all members of those identified as non-Aryan elements. This led to a discrepancy in methods of discrimination, maltreatment and annihilation between the Jews and Roma on one hand, and the Serbs on the other.

Attitude of the Ustashe movement towards the Jews in Croatia was determined by three distinct motives: firstly, *antisemitism* which started to enter the ideology of the movement during the second half of the 1930s, mostly under the influence of National-Socialist ideology. Secondly, the *economic motives*, under which all the property of the Jews was to be nationalized, increasing the regime’s grip on power. Finally, *international circumstances*, such as the attitude of Axis powers, were especially simulative for the persecution of Jews, and played a significant role in determining the Ustashe attitude towards them.

⁷⁷ *Hrvatski narod*, “Zakonska odredba o obrani Hrvatskog naroda...,” no. 78, 1 May 1941, 1-2.

The treatment of Jews in NDH can be described through three processes appearing in two major phases. Processes of *social* and *economic* exclusion of the Jews from the society, marks the first major stage which started immediately after the establishment of NDH. The third process, marking the *extermination* of the Jewish community started during the summer of 1941, when the first organized mass murders started to occur. It is important to note that all three processes were strictly organized by the state and its institutions, and there were only a few cases in which the Ustashe showed arbitrariness in conducting genocide over the Jews, as compared to the mass murder of the Serbs for example.

Economic exclusion

Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, a German military emissary in NDH, went to Adolf Hitler in order to report his impression of the Ustashe after initially spending two days in the capital of Croatia. On the meeting held on 16 April 1941, Hitler asked him how the Ustashe planned to treat the Jews. Horstenau responded by saying that “the [Ustashe] government needs money, that means that they will attempt to solve the Jewish Question as soon as possible”.⁷⁸ It is impressive how soon Horstenau managed to assess the Ustashe, because his opinion turned out to be correct. Only two days after the event, the Ustashe implemented their first antisemitic law which nullified all the business conducted between the Jews and Gentiles in the last two months.⁷⁹ On 21 April, the Ustashe implemented the first law with which they wanted to take over effective control over the Jewish business. According to this law “in all the Jewish, Slovene and Serbian businesses there will be placed a political trustee who will have the right to arrest any manager or businessman who might disrupt the orderly work of the business.”⁸⁰ However, if the improvement in production was an aim at all, it

⁷⁸ Glaise von Horstenau, *Zapisi iz NDH*, 92.

⁷⁹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Prva zakonska odredba o Židovima,” no. 66, 19 April 1941, 1.

⁸⁰ *Hrvatski narod*, “Pred postavljanjem političkih povjerenika,” no. 69, 22 April 1941, 9.

was only a secondary one, because in another article in the newspapers it is claimed that the Ustashe wanted to “nationalize the biggest part of our industry.”⁸¹

The Ustashe primarily wanted to exclude the Jews from the economy, because they wanted to increase the power of the regime, which was in accordance with their totalitarian ideology. In order to be as effective as possible in nationalizing the Jewish, and partially Serbian businesses, they also relied on the German expertise. The Germans already wielded with a considerable knowledge and experience in the process of aryianization of the Jewish property, and upon the request of the Ustashe authorities, the first German experts arrived to assist in the process.⁸² The whole process was ended by 10 October 1941, when virtually all Jewish property had been nationalized.⁸³ Ultimately, it has been assessed by the communist authorities that the Ustashe regime confiscated around total of 5 billion kunas worth of Jewish property throughout the existence of NDH.⁸⁴

It should not be overlooked that through the process of nationalization of the Jewish property, many Ustashe officials increased their wealth, which brings the motive of selfishness into the equation surrounding the exclusion of the Jews from the economy. Slavko Kvaternik testified that “all members of the government of NDH got Jewish villas and apartments. Only Pavelić and his wife got no less than nine such villas for their own personal use.”⁸⁵

A historian and sociologist Michael Mann concluded that all cases of ethnic cleansing involve material interest.⁸⁶ The Ustashe policies of economic exclusion of the Jews in Croatia are not an exception in this reasoning. Economic motive for discrimination of the

⁸¹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Ono što je opće narodno ne smije služiti pojedincima,” no. 69, 22 April 1941, 9.

⁸² Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 176.

⁸³ *Hrvatski narod*, “Podržavljenje imovine Židova i Židovskih poduzeća,” no. 239, 11 October 1941.

⁸⁴ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 184.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 199.

⁸⁶ Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 31.

Jews is indeed one of the most important ones, however what is especially astonishing is the speed and the effectiveness which was shown by the state authorities in the issue of confiscating the Jewish property. In only six months, the state authorities managed to *solve* the Jewish *question* regarding nationalization of their property. This case provides a prime example in which coordination between the Ministry of economy, justice and internal affairs demonstrated unprecedented energy and coordination in order to resolve the Jewish question.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion of the Jews ran parallel, and was closely tied with the economic one. However, the social aspect had a different function. The aim of it was to isolate the Jews from the rest of the society through variety of decrees, and to cut off the social contacts between the Jews and Gentiles. Through this segregation, followed by an aggressive scape-goat propaganda, the Ustashe hoped that it would be more socially acceptable, from the standpoint of the population, to discriminate, and ultimately annihilate the Jews. Since no real ethnic conflict existed between the Jews and Croats, the Ustashe had to employ more effort to secure the support of the population regarding the future maltreatment of the Jews. An enormous propagandistic campaign began against the Jews as soon as the Ustashe ascended to power.

The number of anti-Semitic texts in leading newspapers in Croatia: *Novi List* and *Hrvatski narod*⁸⁷

Year	Number
1941	367
1942	123
1943	74
1944	20
1945	5

About 62% of all the anti-Jewish articles in the two dominant Ustashe newspapers came out during the first nine months of the Ustashe being in power. This indicates how important it was for the Ustashe to indoctrinate the population.

However, the propaganda can also be seen in a different light, as yet another instrument of conducting genocide over the Jews. The psychological impact it had on the Jews is unimaginable, and the social pressure revolving around them led to a considerable rise in suicides among the Jewish community. Faced with dehumanization, discrimination, maltreatment, loss of property and very often loss of the closest family members, some Jews saw suicide as the only way out of a desperate situation.⁸⁸ Since the social pressure and exclusion were planned by the Ustashe, suicides among the Jews can also be seen as one of the methods of conducting their total destruction.

Although ghettos never existed in NDH, considerable physical obstacles were put into place so that the Jews would not be able to socialize with the Gentiles. On 21 April

⁸⁷ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 113-4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 119.

1941, the Jews were forbidden to enter coffee-shops, restaurants and bars.⁸⁹ On 5 May, all the Jewish stores had to be marked in order to prevent the Gentiles from buying goods from the Jews.⁹⁰ Five days later, registration of the Jews in Zagreb began. All the Jews had to report to the police in Zagreb, and similar orders followed in other cities with a considerable Jewish population.⁹¹ To further emphasize that the Jews have no legal rights as citizens, it was forbidden for the attorneys to intervene in any suits against the state, or to mediate between the authorities and individuals Jews.⁹²

However, one of the most humiliating measures for the Jews must have been their visual branding which was first introduced on 14 May in Osijek.⁹³ The wearing of a “Jewish sign” became obligatory for all the Jews on the territory of NDH on 22 May 1941. It is interesting to note that the Germans introduced the same measure towards the German Jewry only on 1 September 1941, meaning that the Ustashe preceded them in these measures by four months.⁹⁴

The Ustashe press did not hide who was the role model for the persecution of the Jews and on 22 April 1941, in a newspaper article, they proclaimed that current measures against the Jews “are not the only ones, there are more to follow, and step by step they will further arrange the Jewish question, which will be done in the manner of the Axis states.”⁹⁵ However, this did not mean that the Ustashe waited for instructions or simply imitated other measures implemented in the Third Reich or elsewhere. They often implemented strict

⁸⁹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Židovima zabranjen polazak, kavana, restauracija i gostionica,” no. 69, 22 April 1941, 10.

⁹⁰ *Hrvatski narod*, “Oznake za Židovske trgovine,” no. 83, 6 May 1941, 8.

⁹¹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Posebna ispostava Ustaskog redarstva za nadzor nad židovima,” no. 88, 11 May 1941, 5.
See also *Hrvatski narod*, “Prijava Židova u Osijeku,” no. 90, 13 May 1941, 5.

⁹² *Hrvatski narod*, “Odvjetnicima je zabranjeno posredovati u političkim stvarima,” no. 93, 16 May 1941, 8.

⁹³ *Hrvatski narod*, “Židovi u Osijeku moraju nositi žute trake,” no. 92, 15 May 1941, 6.

⁹⁴ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 125.

⁹⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, “Opravdane i potrebne mjere protiv Židova,” no. 70, 23 April 1941, 10.

measures, and showed a great amount of initiative and energy on their own, without any foreign intervention or pressures.

Extermination

The first ideologically motivated murders of the Jews started to appear as soon as NDH was formed. One of such cases already appeared on 12 April, when the Germans and Ustashe killed a Jewish merchant in the center of Zagreb under the excuse that he was hiding goods like coffee and flour.⁹⁶ However, cases like these still cannot be described as the beginning of the organized or planned campaign of mass murder or genocide. Ante Pavelić and his closest associates have still not arrived to Zagreb, and therefore a plan to commence the mass murder of the Jews seems groundless. Nonetheless, the situation was evolving extremely fast, and already on 6 May, the leader of the Ustashe movement, Ante Pavelić, announced that “the Jewish question would be radically solved according to racial and economic principles”.⁹⁷

Individual arrests of prominent Jews and group arrests were already under way during April and May, but mass arrests were missing, because there was still no major concentration camp which would be able to take a larger amount of people. Although the Jewish community was fairly small, numbering around 40,000 people, the organizational and infrastructural solutions were lacking.⁹⁸ However, this changed when the first system of concentration and death camps was organized on 18 June 1941.⁹⁹ This initial camp system is sometimes called Gospić-Jadovno-Pag, because Gospić was the main transitional area through which prisoners were transferred either to the island of Pag or to the Jadovno camp which

⁹⁶ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 107.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 111.

⁹⁸ Bartulin. *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 257.

⁹⁹ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća* [1941: The Year That Keeps Returning] (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2007), 121.

was situated on Velebit. When the camp system started functioning, an order came through in July, according to which all the Jews and Serbs who were considered undesirable should be transferred to this camp system.¹⁰⁰ The Serbs and Jews were no longer to be mere prisoners; their transfer to concentration camps marks the beginning of a completely new phase in their treatment.

By the end of June, at least 800 Jews were already transferred from Zagreb to the camp system of Gospić-Jadovno-Pag. By 12 July, another 400 were transported, and by the end of the month an additional 700 Jews were deported to the camps.¹⁰¹ As a result of swift deportations, first cities were already being declared as cleansed from the Jews. For example, this was the case with Varaždin, one of the biggest Croatian cities, which was proclaimed *judenrein* already on 12 July.¹⁰² In total, between June and August, the period when this camp system existed, around 2,500 Jews from all parts of NDH lost their lives.¹⁰³ However, this only marks the experimental phase of the destruction of the Jews, in which all state capacities have still not been employed. The bloodiest phase in the destruction of the Jews and other ethnic minorities started during autumn of 1941 when the largest death camp, Jasenovac, was opened and started operating. In Jasenovac, more than 13,000 Jews lost their lives, which is an issue I will address in the last chapter.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, the Germans offered help to the Ustashe authorities regarding the final solution of the “Jewish question” on the territory of NDH in 1942. They offered to transport the remaining Croatian Jews *to the East*. The Ustashe authorities accepted German assistance, and in August 1942, around 5,000 Croatian Jews were transferred to Auschwitz. An-

¹⁰⁰ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 121-2

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 259.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 260.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 276.

¹⁰⁴ “List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac Concentration Camp,” *Jasenovac Memorial Site*, <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6284>, last accessed on June 2 2015.

other transport of 2,000 Jews left Croatia for Auschwitz in 1943, all of whom were gassed upon arrival.¹⁰⁵

The Ustashe employed the full force of the state institutions regarding the solution of the “Jewish question.” Only twenty days after they came to power, they strictly defined who was identified as a Jew. A framework of laws regarding the economic and social exclusion of the Jews from the Croatian society followed, and it was implemented and endorsed by all the state institutions. The first mass deportations and mass murder of the Jews started during the summer of 1941. Yet, deportations and camp system through which the murder of the Jews was conducted was organized and planned by the Ministry of Interior. Ultimately, in April 1944, the German police attaché in Croatia, Hans Helm, proclaimed that “overall, the Jewish question should be seen as having been solved in Croatia.”¹⁰⁶

The “Roma Question”

Researching genocide and ethnic cleansing conducted over the Roma in NDH proves to be a highly problematic task. One of the prime issues in this undertaking is the lack of official documents referring to it, and a general poverty of memoirs or testimonies from the Roma survivors. There are only a couple of references to the “Roma Question” in the Ustashe press, and most of the information regarding the treatment of the Roma in camps can only be taken from the memoirs of the Serbian, Jewish or Croatian survivors who first-handedly witnessed the mass murder of the Roma. Another issue is the number of victims, and even the number of the Roma living on the territory of NDH at the time of its proclamation is contested in the historiography.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Korb, “Nation Building and Mass Violence: The Independent State of Croatia 1941-1945.” *The Routledge History of the Holocaust*, edited by Jonathan C. Friedman. (London: Routledge, 2010), 300.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

The fate of the Roma in NDH was determined by the set of race laws issued on 30 April 1941. In them, the Roma were identified as an “un-Aryan” element, effectively equating their status with the Jews.¹⁰⁷ However, the treatment of the Roma and steps towards their extermination were fairly different from the Jewish and Serbian one.

The first step, and a precondition for the state-organized genocide over the Roma was establishing their exact numbers, and place of residence. To assure this information the Ministry of Interior issued an order on 3 July, according to which all the Roma, including women and children had to report to authorities between 22 and 23 July 1941.¹⁰⁸ This was among the rare implemented measures targeting the Roma, and they were subsequently ignored in public speeches and the press. At the same time the Serbs and Jews were ruthlessly persecuted on the whole territory of NDH. This shows a great discrepancy in the Ustashe policy on the matter of which minority groups were considered more threatening, as well as which ones were minor threats. In this sense, the Roma were considered a more of a *hygienic threat* to the society, than a real political, or military one. They were seen *only* as a social and racial threat, without posing danger to the security of the regime or the state itself.¹⁰⁹ The Jewish and Serbian *questions* were treated as a far greater priority; the Jews because of the immediate economic, political and international reasons, and the Serbs because of the political, ethnic and security motives.

More than twelve months had passed since the racial laws were put into effect, until the first measures for the total destruction of the Roma were starting to be implemented. The

¹⁰⁷ *Hrvatski narod*, “Zakonska odredba o rasnoj pripadnosti i zakonska oredba o zaštiti arijske krvi i časti hrvatskog naroda,” no. 78, 1 May 1941, 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Hrvatski narod*, “Cigani s područja Zagreba moraju se prijaviti,” no. 155, 19 July 1941.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Biondich, “Persecution of Roma-Sinti in Croatia 1941-1945,” *Roma and Sinti: Under-Studied Victims of Nazism* (Washington: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies; Unites State Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 34-35.

destruction of the Roma in NDH began on 16 May 1942 when the Ustashe secret service¹¹⁰ and Ministry of Interior ordered the start of their arrests.¹¹¹ Every registered Roma had to be arrested, disregarding age or sex. Deportations of the assembled Roma were highly organized and saw cooperation of all relevant security and transportation agencies, including the military, gendarme, police, and local officials. Arrests were most often conducted during the night, and the Roma were deceived into compliance by telling them that they were only being resettled and that they would be given land to work on when they reach their final destination.¹¹²

The press was unusually secretive about the operations surrounding the Roma. A historian of this period, Mark Biondich, managed to identify only two articles referring to the Roma during the height of their persecution in 1942.¹¹³ The reason for the absence of the “Roma Question” from the press might be that the Ustashe felt confident enough to start their persecution without the necessary propagandistic preparations which were practiced with regards to the Serbs, and especially Jews. This meant that the Ustashe were sure that the population would neither protest, nor intervene in the Roma persecution.

The greatest resistance towards the policy of persecution against the Roma came from the Muslim community. They protested against the persecution of the Islam-practicing Roma. This protest aimed against the racial laws under which all the Roma were to be treated in the same way. The Ustashe had to compromise, since the movement relied heavily on the support of the Muslims, because without them on the side of the Croats the regime would not have a convincing ethnic majority in NDH. The Ustashe had to do everything in their power to indulge the Muslim community, and this was a compromise they were will-

¹¹⁰ Ustaška nadzorna služba.

¹¹¹ Biondich, *Persecution of Roma-Sinti*, 36.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, 37.

ing to do. *Realpolitik* in this case was more important than the principles of racist ideology. Therefore, most of the Muslim Roma were not touched, and those who were arrested and sent to Jasenovac by the local Ustashe were soon released.¹¹⁴

All the non-Muslim arrested Roma were to be deported to the Jasenovac death camp. This included whole families that were kept together, and by the end of the year 1942, almost all of them were killed.¹¹⁵ From the total population of around 26,000-28,000 before the genocide, in a census of 1948, only 827 Roma were registered on the territory of ex-NDH. However, it seems that a smaller number of Roma managed to escape, either into the occupied Serbia, or to the Italian occupational zone, and save their lives.¹¹⁶ Although a small number of Roma might have escaped, the overwhelming majority were killed in Jasenovac, and the genocide of the Roma was the most sophisticated and well-organized mass murder under the Ustashe regime. The speed of arrests, transportations and murder eradicated the whole Roma community within the period of seven months. This was a state-organized genocide in which all the state authorities worked as a completely coordinated mechanism, employing all the state capacities required for mass murder. The police and gendarme organized arrests with the help of local authorities. Railways were ready and available, and were transporting victims to their final destination - Jasenovac. If one looks at the percentage, Roma are the ethnic group that suffered the greatest casualties during the period of the Ustashe reign, facing an almost complete destruction.

¹¹⁴ Biondich, *Persecution of Roma-Sinti* 37-8.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 40.

The “Serbian Question”

In the Ustashe concept of ethnic cleansing, the Jewish and Roma *questions* were identified as racial elements, each with its own *rationale* behind it. The Jews were identified as such because of the *international* and *economic*, and the Roma because of *social* reasons. Unlike, the Jews and Roma, the Serbs were not identified as a racial element, but they were targeted for ethnic cleansing because of *political*, *historical* and *ethnic* reasons. Being identified as a political threat they were actually the biggest thorn in the eyes of the Ustashe officials and ideologues.

Seeing an opportunity in the fact that the Serbs were unprotected in the current international setup and that none of the neighboring nations would intervene if they were mistreated, the Ustashe wanted to seize it. As noted earlier, a consensus was reached within the Ustashe elites on ethnic cleansing of the Serbs, Jews and Roma. Yet, the Ustashe encountered grave difficulties with the policies regarding ethnic cleansing of the Serbs in NDH.

First and foremost, the sheer number of Serbs represented a major problem. Unlike the Jews and Roma who together constituted no more than 1% of the total population, the Serbs constituted 26% of it, or 1,85 million.¹¹⁷ Moreover, unlike the Jews who were mostly concentrated in urban centers, most prominently Zagreb, the Serbs were spread and mixed with Croats on 60 to 70% of the territory of the state.¹¹⁸ This caused considerable logistic and infrastructural problems regarding physically-invasive solutions to “the Serbian question.”

Although there was a consensus among the Ustashe elites regarding “the Serbian question,” meaning that they had to disappear from the territory of NDH, there was no con-

¹¹⁷ *Hrvatski narod*, “Stanovništvo i gospodarska snaga naše države: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska u brojkama.” no. 96, 19 May 1941, 5. See also Bartulin, *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 257.

¹¹⁸ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 380.

sensus regarding the policy under which this would be done. There were three most often considered solutions: *assimilation*, *deportation*, and *mass murder*. In practice, the Ustashe were shifting between these three policies towards the Serbs throughout 1941, and to a lesser degree till the end of the war in 1945.

There are indications that the Ustashe unified these three policies into a single plan of the final solution to the “Serbian question.” Allegedly, in this way, one third of the Serbs had to be killed, one third deported, and finally the rest assimilated. According to one of the testimonies, Vlado Singer¹¹⁹ a highly ranked Ustashe working on the organization of their secret service, in May of 1941 said that “our revolution is taking place in midst of a great war. In such circumstances everything can happen, what usually cannot occur. A lot can be done which could not be done in times of peace. We have to seize this opportunity. Serbs have been our death-threat for three hundred years... Now is the chance! We have to kill one third, a third will run away, and the last third will be Catholicized and become Croats!”¹²⁰ A similar attitude was expressed by the minister of education Mile Budak, who in a speech in July said that the Ustashe will kill one part of Serbs, the other part will be resettled, and the remaining ones will be converted to the Catholic faith and thus made Croats.¹²¹ Historian Jill Irvine also mentioned the plan about the thirds; however she attributes this plan to the statement given by Slavko Kvaternik.¹²²

It is possible that the plan about the thirds regarding the Serbian *question* was held as a conviction by certain individuals and even groups in the Ustashe leadership. Nonetheless

¹¹⁹ Vlado Singer (1908-1943) was a prominent Ustashe who was in emigration in Italy after 1934. He was described as a brilliant organizer, and as such he was given a task of establishing the Ustashe secret service soon after the Ustashe took power. He was arrested in September 1941, under the pretense that he tried to intervene for the release of several communists from prison. However the true reason for his arrest and subsequent murder in the concentration camp was probably his Jewish descent. Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 359.

¹²⁰ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 113.

¹²¹ Dedijer, *Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 130.

¹²² Irvine, *The Croatian Question*, 96.

there is no written evidence or enough verifiable statements which could confirm that this was indeed the plan which was accepted on the national level, nor that it was well outlined by the leadership. It is more credible that there was a general attitude among the Ustashe that all the three methods of *assimilation*, *mass murder* and *deportations* should be applied to solve the Serbian *question*. One should not *a priori* exclude the option that all three variants of ethnic cleansing were held opened because they provided a significant flexibility to the regime, and fed the consensus.

If we look at the solution to the Serbian *question* from a comparative perspective it mostly resembles the German treatment of Poles during the same period. Scholars like Michael Mann claim that the Germans also created a plan of mixed methods in order to solve the Polish *question*. Again the plan about the thirds emerges. One third of Poles, the intellectual elite was supposed to be murdered, another third had to be segregated, and the last third was supposed to be deported into Russia.¹²³ Moreover, Mann claims that the German plan about killing the intellectual elite was conducted in a more thorough way, because almost all highly educated Poles they could lay their hands on were killed.¹²⁴

Ultimately, Pavelić wanted to make sure that he has free hands in conducting ethnic cleansing, and that no one would interfere in this process. He brought up the issue on a meeting with Hitler which was held on 6 June 1941. Hitler responded favorably towards Pavelić's plans and told him that "if the state of Croatia really wants to be solid, it will have to conduct a national policy of intolerance for the next 50 years."¹²⁵ Hitler reinstated his support for the Ustashe policies of ethnic cleansing on another occasion during September of 1942. He said that the Croats were completely loyal to him and that there is no reason for

¹²³ Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 186.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ As quoted in Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 120.

him to intervene in the matter of ethnic cleansing, and concluded by saying “just let the Croats express their anger.”¹²⁶ After he managed to reach a consensus on ethnic cleansing inside the leadership, and received international reassurances and support directly from Hitler, Pavelić could commence with the national policy of ethnic cleansing.

Ethnocide

Regardless of the method of conducting ethnic cleansing, there was a consensus that Serbdom had to disappear from Croatia. The Serbs were described as an ethnic group, and the first step towards their destruction was the annihilation of their ethnicity. Since ethnic groups are defined in cultural terms, the destruction of a culture on a certain territory designated a precondition for ethnic cleansing.¹²⁷ Therefore, ethnocide¹²⁸ or wiping out of the Serbian culture was one of the first clearly defined goals of the Ustashe.

One of the first acts of the Ustashe regarding ethnocide over the Serbs was the *Law Decree regarding the ban of Cyrillic script*, brought on 25 April 1941, only fifteen days after the Ustashe proclaimed their state and took power.¹²⁹ The Ustashe considered the Cyrillic script to be one of the essential parts of the Serbian national identity. Furthermore, to prevent any sort of education on the Serbian history and culture, the Ustashe banned all the Serbian schools, cultural institutions and assemblies in June 1941.¹³⁰ The height of the Ustashe ethnocide was the ban of the name “Serbian-Orthodox” religion which came into effect in July.¹³¹ The Serbian name could not be tolerated for any institution in NDH under the Ustashe, and therefore they renamed the whole religion into “Greek-eastern.”

¹²⁶ Glaise von Hossrstenau, *Zapisi iz NDH*, 147.

¹²⁷ Mann, *The Dark side of Democracy*, 11.

¹²⁸ Ethnocide is a term used to describe wiping out a certain group and its culture. Ibid, 16.

¹²⁹ Škiljan, *Teror Ustaškog režima*, 345.

¹³⁰ *Hrvatski narod*, “Ukidanje srpskih konfensionalnih škola,” no. 128, 22 June 1941. See also Škiljan. *Teror Ustaškog režima*, 345.

¹³¹ Škiljan. *Teror Ustaškog režima*, 345.

Cultural purification of NDH was further induced by the eradication of the Serbian names from specific villages, for example on 25 August they changed the official name of a town Srpske (Serbian) Moravice into Hrvatske (Croatian) Moravice. Further cultural cleansing of public area was enforced by changing street names with any Serbian connotations.¹³²

Raphael Lemkin, a famous jurist who coined the term “genocide” said that “genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.”¹³³ If we follow Lemkin’s argument, then the ethnocide over the Serbs which started as early as April 1941, marked the first step in conducting genocide of the Serbs in NDH.¹³⁴ Ethnocide itself was a state organized and coordinated undertaking, consensually arranged by the Ustashe leadership, issued through the state legislature and laws, and implemented through the state institutions.

Politicide

Closely connected to the issue of ethnocide was the tendency to commit politicicide over the Serbs in NDH. The term politicicide refers to the killing of the entire current leadership and future “potential leadership class of a more generally victimized and feared group.”¹³⁵ In reality the aim of politicicide is to annihilate the intelligentsia, political activists, military and cultural leadership of an ethnic group. Politicide itself is in service of ethnocide because its aim is to destroy potential agents with the capacity to perpetuate cultural and political life of an ethnic group.

Those targeted for politicicide were forbidden the mere attempt to assimilate with the Croatian nation. This is proved by an order issued by the Ministry of Justice and Religion

¹³² Škiljan, *Teror Ustaškog režima*, 345.

¹³³ Ward Churchill, Genocide: “Toward a Functional Definition,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* (July 1986 11: 403-430), 407.

¹³⁴ Historian Tomislav Dulić described the Ustashe policy towards the Serbs as an “attempted genocide.” See Dulić, *Mass Killing in the Independent State of Croatia*, 258, 274.

¹³⁵ Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 16.

on 14 July 1941 in which instructions were given on who was permitted to enter the Catholic faith, an act equated with assimilation. In the decree it was declared that “the Croatian government does not intend to accept within the Catholic Church either priests or schoolmasters or, in a word, any of the intelligentsia – including rich Orthodox tradesmen and artisans.”¹³⁶ In order to clarify who was eligible for assimilation, the Ustashe decided to make a list of the Serbs and their occupations. Such order was issued on 7 June, and all the Serbs who arrived on the territory of NDH after January 1900 and their decedents had to report to the Ustashe authorities and, among other things, declare their precise occupation.¹³⁷

However, a question arose - if the Serbian intelligentsia is not subjected to assimilation, what was to be with them? One of the Ustashe officials said in a private conversation that “the government does not intend to slaughter all the Serbs in Croatia. The Ustashe think that it is enough to annihilate the Serbian priests, professors, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and wealthier merchants and peasants. The rest are either going to run away to Serbia, or they will be catholicized. Accordingly, it would be enough to kill no more than half a million Serbs, maybe even less.”¹³⁸

Initially, the murder of those targeted for politicide was conducted under the veil of quasi-legality. *The Law Decree on the Defense of the People and the State* was already carried into effect on 17 April 1941 in order for the Ustashe to legalize liquidation of the political enemies.¹³⁹ Politicide was justified through the usage of this law, and was conducted through a network of special and mobile courts. To demonstrate how the special courts operated, a statement by Šime Balen can be illustrative; he claimed that

¹³⁶ Steinberg, *Types of Genocide*, 182.

¹³⁷ *Hrvatski narod*, “Srbijanci moraju se prijaviti,” no. 114, 8 June 1941, 2.

¹³⁸ Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 77.

¹³⁹ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 383.

Special courts immediately developed a wide range of activities, and carried out hundreds and thousands of [death] sentences. It was enough for a person to make a private complaint to a Ustashe and to be accused of violating the ‘honor of the Croatian people’ and carried in front of a court which would sentence him to death as a traitor. If a Ustashe wished to get a Jewish or Serbian shop, it was sufficient for him to accuse the owner of ‘sabotage’ and get him in front of the court where he would be sentenced as a traitor and shot, and the shop would be awarded to him... In the first days [of the regime in power] these methods were massively applied especially against the Serbs and Jews, and later on against the Croats too.¹⁴⁰

The sheer number of death sentences demonstrates that the Ustashe activity can be described as a legalized mass murder. Well informed priest Augustin Juretić¹⁴¹ claimed that one of the judges of the mobile courts celebrated 1,500 carried death sentences already in December 1942; however he was only one of the judges out of total 18 courts on the territory of NDH.¹⁴² Politicide which was carried out through the network of mobile courts, formed only seven days after the Ustashe came to power means that politicide itself was one of the first aims of the state in general. Therefore, politicide represents one of the first state-organized policies of ethnic cleansing in NDH.

Deportations of Serbs

The policy of ethnic cleansing through deportations was probably the favorable solution for many Ustashe from all factions of the movement for many reasons. First of all, there would have to be no further bloodshed or massacres which seriously damaged the reputation of the state and caused staunch resistance. Secondly, this would benefit the economy, since lot of

¹⁴⁰ Krizman, *NDH između Mussolinija i Hitlera*, 120.

¹⁴¹ Augustin Juretić (1890-1954) was a Croatian priest holding many high positions within the structures of the clergy. He was a Croatian emissary in the Red Cross. Dizdar, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 175-6.

¹⁴² Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 281.

properties would stay intact, whilst in quelling the rebellion many households were burned or blown up. Moreover, there would be an organized undertaking by the state which would aim at avoiding chaos, evident in other solutions such as religious conversions or mass murder. What was the most important was the fact that deportations were already tried and they seemed an effective means in pacifying the ethnically mixed areas or states. For example, there were 1, 5 million people exchanged between Greece and Turkey, and between Bulgaria and Greece 250,000 people in the aftermath of the World War I.¹⁴³ More recently, the Nazis were applying resettlement policies towards Poles and Jews believing that this could be a permanent solution to the ethnic problem in their territories.¹⁴⁴ The lessons learned from these cases must have had an influence on the Ustashe policy-makers.

Deportations regarding the Serbs were conducted in three distinct manners, *organized*, *wild* and *voluntary*. *Organized* deportations were the ones conducted by NDH and its authorities regarding agreements with the German authorities. *Wild deportations* were those conducted illegally, either in terms of not being organized by the state directly, or contrary to the international agreement with Germany. Finally, “voluntary” flights from the country were something that the Croatian authorities favored, hoping that the Serbs would leave the territory of the newly formed state of Croatia on their own. For this purpose they put the Serbs under immense pressure, employing violence, discrimination, propaganda and robbery hoping that they would flee on their own.¹⁴⁵

Organized and “legal” deportations

The first expulsions conducted by the Ustashe were already under way on 16 April 1941, only a day after Ante Pavelić and other emigrant Ustashe arrived in Zagreb. On that date, the Ustashe proclaimed that *undesirable elements had to leave Zagreb* in six hours-time. It

¹⁴³ Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 67.

¹⁴⁴ Browning, *Nazi Resettlement Policy*, 9-14.

¹⁴⁵ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 392.

seems that a couple hundred people, mostly the Jews and Serbs were identified in this term, and in addition *the undesirable elements such as drifters were expelled*.¹⁴⁶ Although these initial expulsions were issued by the government they were guided more by an impulse than a specific system or plan.

One of the first planned and systematic steps towards the expulsion of the Serbs was committed on 18 April, when the state decided to confiscate the property of the so-called Serbian volunteers. The Serbian volunteers were identified as people who voluntarily joined the Serbian army during the World War I and as a reward after the war they received, among other things, land in the Croatian region of Slavonia. The Ustashe and other nationalists claimed that this was a planned attempt at changing the ethnic composition of the Croatian lands through Serbian colonization. Therefore, the Ustashe decided to nationalize the lands of the so-called Serbian volunteers and to deport them back to Serbia.¹⁴⁷ Already in the months of May and June, about 5,370 Serbs were deported, predominantly from this group of the so-called Serbian volunteers.¹⁴⁸

The turning point in the scale and the planning of deportation policies came on 4 June 1941, when the German-Croatian agreement on population exchange was signed. Since the Germans annexed large parts of Slovenia, they wanted to cleanse a part of it through a population exchange program, in which Slovenes from the Reich would be deported to Croatia and the same number of Serbs would be deported from Croatia to the German-occupied Serbia.¹⁴⁹ The Ustashe cost-benefit analysis was simple: the incoming Slovenes from the Reich would be a far lesser problem, compared to the benefit of deporting a large number of the Serbs.

¹⁴⁶ *Hrvatski narod*, "Nepoćudni elementi ostavljaju glavni grad Hrvatske," no. 64, 17 April 1941, 8.

¹⁴⁷ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 392.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 393.

¹⁴⁹ Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 126.

The German-Croatian exchange plan was supposed to be conducted in three waves. In the first wave, taking place between June and July of 1941, about 5,000 of Slovene intelligentsia would be directly deported from Slovenia to the occupied Serbia.¹⁵⁰ The Ustashe would not take them because of the same reasons for which they wanted to get rid of the Serbian intelligentsia. Intellectuals and political activists would represent an obstacle in assimilating further incoming Slovenes, and intellectuals had a capacity to organize resistance towards the Ustashe government.

The second wave, taking place between July and August, will have included the deportation of 25,000 Slovenes to Croatia, and the same number of the Serbs would be deported to Serbia from the territory of Croatia.¹⁵¹

The third wave, which would have taken place in September and October, 65,000 Slovenes were supposed to be deported to the territory of Croatia, and the same number of Serbs from Croatia to the territory of Serbia.¹⁵² The agreement also included deportation of 30,000 Serbs, whose citizenship was not recognized by the Ustashe authorities.¹⁵³

In order to avoid any organized resistance or evasion of those targeted for deportation, the assembly and arrests of the deportees were conducted during night. After the authorities came to their doors in the middle of the night, those designated for deportation were given only thirty minutes to get ready. The deportees were only allowed to take maximum of fifty kilos of property. Just before they were taken away, the deportees had to give their keys to the local police who would legally seal their apartments or houses. The deportees could not sell, or give away their house to a third person, nor could they delegate someone who would take care of it, meaning that the deportations were considered a permanent

¹⁵⁰ Škiljan, *Teror Ustaškog režima*, 365.

¹⁵¹ Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 126.

¹⁵² Škiljan, *Teror Ustaškog režima*, 365.

¹⁵³ Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 126.

solution.¹⁵⁴ Their possessions were confiscated by the state according to the *Law Decree about property of those who emigrated from the territory of NDH*, issued on 7 August 1941, right in the middle of the greatest deportation waves.¹⁵⁵ The possessions of the deported Serbs were either auctioned, or they remained state property with delegated trustees who would use them themselves, and this was for example happening with shops, workshops or other business enterprises previously owned by the Serbs. Participation of the local population was most evident in the terms of economic gains which they enjoyed with the deportation of the Serbs.¹⁵⁶

Arriving at an average rate of 500 deportees a day from July onwards, about 26,000 Slovenes came to Croatia through this population exchange.¹⁵⁷ The total number of “legally” deported Serbs from the territory of NDH to the occupied Serbia was at the time 17,706.¹⁵⁸ However, the real number of the deported Serbs was far larger, because the Ustashe either illegally deported or banished them, or they simply fled on their own under the immense pressure exercised over them by the Ustashe.

Illegal expulsions of the Serbs

Illegal expulsions of the Serbs were appearing parallel with legal deportations. The number of the Serbs who were supposed to be legally deported to Serbia was not satisfactory to the Ustashe. The complete number of the deported Serbs under the agreement with Germany was supposed to be no more than approximately 120,000; however, that was only close to 7% of the total Serbian population in NDH. Therefore the Ustashe organized parallel expul-

¹⁵⁴ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 394.

¹⁵⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, “Zakonska odredba o imovini osoba iseljenih s područja NDH,” no. 175, 8 August 1941, 5.

¹⁵⁶ *Hrvatski narod*, “Onima koji žele kupiti židovska ili srpska poduzeća,” no. 175, 8 August 1941, 5. See also Korb, *Understanding Ustaša Violence*, 10.

¹⁵⁷ Korb, *Nation Building and Mass Violence*, 294.

¹⁵⁸ Korb sets the number at about 18,000 deportees. Ibid. Tomasevich gives a somewhat more precise number of 17,706 deportees. Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 395. Krizman on the other hand says that there were only 13,234 “legally” deported Serbs who were transported to Serbia. Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 127.

sions which were “illegal” from the German point of view. For example, Germans reported that only on 10 July 1941, about 6.000 Serbs from Bosnia crossed the border with Serbia illegally.¹⁵⁹ Certain estimates claim that the Ustashe “illegally” expelled around 90,000 Serbs.¹⁶⁰

Self-organized flight

In addition to the legal deportations, forced ones, and illegal coerced expulsions of the Serbs, the Ustashe regime put an enormous effort to pressure the Serbs through propaganda, discrimination and violence, hoping that at least a part of them would leave the country on their own. This pressure aimed at the Serbs was demonstrated in several different ways, but it consisted mostly of *propagandistic pressure*; closely connected to it was the *arousal of fear*; finally and most effectively there was the *economic pressure*.

The Ustashe employed many laws and decrees to eliminate the Serbs from the economy of NDH, and in this way the status of the Serbs was very similar to the Jews. The economic deprivation of the Serbs had many different functions, one of them being to force them out of the country by eliminating their means of existence.

The first acts regarding the economic deprivation of the Serbs were issued when the Ustashe took power. For example on 16 April, all the Serbs were fired from the Zagreb police.¹⁶¹ Already on 17 April, more politically *undesirable* people were fired; for example in the Workers Chamber¹⁶² 22 people lost their jobs under the justification that they were “Yugoslavs, Yugo-Marxists and liberals.” The article in the newspapers in which this decree was published, concluded with a statement that “the decision is in accordance with general cleansing, which is intended to be implemented in full capacity without any obstacles on the

¹⁵⁹ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 395.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Velike promjene kod Redarstvenog Ravnateljstva u Zagrebu,” no. 64, 17 April 1941, 8.

¹⁶² In Croatian Radnička Komora.

complete territory of the Croatian national life.”¹⁶³ Therefore, these were not provisional decisions made by individuals, but it was a policy of the state and the core of the Ustashe movement itself. This attitude that the country had to be purified of the Serbs only started with economic deprivation. On 10 May, the Ministry of Interior decided that all the Serbs who *came to the territory of NDH after 1 January 1900* and their descendants would lose their jobs in the public administration. Furthermore, those who were essential to the state, like the Serbs employed in the railways, would not be fired until Croatian substitution can be found. However, those who remained in service could not occupy higher positions, like the managerial ones.¹⁶⁴

In addition to the economic deprivation, harassment, propaganda, arrests, mass murder and other methods employed against the Serbs certainly influenced many of them to try and save their lives by fleeing the country on their own. Ultimately, there were about 200,000 Serbian refugees from the territory of NDH in Serbia by the end of the summer of 1941. However, only 17,706 of them were transported under the population exchange agreement between the Ustashe and the Germans. The deportation operations were definitely stopped by the Germans on 22 September 1941, making the policy of deportations a failure.¹⁶⁵ The Germans stopped the deportations because there was an open rebellion in Serbia already under way, and the occupational authorities there rightfully assumed that incoming deported Serbs would be especially prone to joining the rebellion. German occupational authorities had no way of housing or feeding such a great number of the new Serbian refugees.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ *Hrvatski narod*, “Nepoćudni namještenici Radničke Komore,” no. 65, 18 April 1941, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Škiljan. *Teror ustaškog režima*, 350.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 367.

¹⁶⁶ German historian Alexander Korb claims that the deportations were stopped because *the German authorities were highly dissatisfied with the deportation violence of the Ustaša*. Although this certainly played a role, it cannot be the sole reason, or the most important one in this matter. Korb, *Nation Building and Mass Violence*, 295.

With failing deportation policy, ethnic cleansing through non-violent methods came to a halt, and the Ustashe managed only to get rid of approximately 11% of the total Serbian population from NDH. However it has to be taken into account that these policies further agitated the Serbian population in Croatia, and many of the deportees who joined the resistance came back to Croatia during the war only not as civilians, but as Chetniks, with guns and determination to put an end to the state which persecuted them.

Assimilationist policies towards the Serbs

The policies of forced deportation and mass murder can both be understood as physically invasive towards the Serbian minority, attempting to remove them from the territory of NDH. However the Ustashe did come up with a non-invasive policy regarding the solution of the “Serbian Question” – the policy of assimilation.

In order to implement this policy, certain preconditions had to be fulfilled. Firstly, through a thorough politicide, the Serbian intelligentsia had to disappear. Professors, priests, intellectuals, state officials and politicians were all seen as the carriers of the Serbian culture and ethnicity, and therefore had to be eliminated either through deportations or mass murder. In addition to politicide, ethnocide had to be conducted, meaning the destruction of everything that constituted the Serbian ethnicity and culture, including language, religion, traditions and institutions. Only after these preconditions were fulfilled, the Ustashe would show dedication to the policy of assimilation.

For the assimilation policy to be applied, the Ustashe had to evaluate what actually constituted the Serbian identity and which parts of their identity had to be changed in order for them to become fully assimilated Croats. The dominant markers of Serbdom were language, political affiliation, and especially religion. Since Croatian and Serbian languages were fairly similar, as well as the cultural traits, the most important signifier of Serbdom

became their Orthodox religion as opposed to the Croatian affiliation with Catholicism. This interpretation of national signifiers was greatly influenced by the Croatian Catholic-oriented intellectuals who considered Serbian Orthodox Church as not merely religious, but also a political entity.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, this interpretation was adjusted to the contemporary interpretation of racial Croatdom, and therefore it was claimed by the pro-assimilationist Ustashe that the Serbs on the territory of NDH were actually racial Croats who adopted Orthodox religion during the Ottoman conquests. This was done in order to save their lives, since Catholics were persecuted.¹⁶⁸

With the ban on the usage of the Cyrillic script, as well as the dissolution of all Serbian schools and cultural institutions, religion became the key issue. However, since the assimilation itself became a prime political matter in which the state and the Ustashe movement wanted to have a prominent role, there were increasing attempts to subject religious institutions to the state and the movement's influence.

One of the first regulations concerning the religious sphere was issued on 3 May 1941, when the Ustashe government issued the *Law Decree regarding religious conversion*, under which all the previous legal regulations regarding the issue of conversion were suspended. Under the given decree it was required to attain the permission by the state to convert to Catholicism.¹⁶⁹ This clear intervention of the state into religious matters is a general tendency shown by totalitarian regimes; in the context of the Ustashe movement however, it had another particular function - politicide. The intent to prevent the conversion of the Serbian intelligentsia and other potentially *damaging elements*, is best illustrated in a decree issued by the Ministry of Justice and Religion on 14 July 1941, and sent to all regional authorities. According to it, the local authorities had to be "careful about the Greek-eastern

¹⁶⁷ Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 79.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁶⁹ Krizman. *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 120. See also Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 82.

teachers, priests, merchants, rich entrepreneurs, peasants, and intelligentsia in general; these groups should not be given the permission to convert, the only exception is if their honor can be proved, because the overall attitude of the government is not to issue the permit for conversion to these individuals.”¹⁷⁰ A similar order, confirming the previous one, was issued on 15 September 1941.¹⁷¹ From the standpoint of the Ustashe government, the policy of conversions was interconnected with other policies of ethnic cleansing and had to be adjusted to it. The policy could never work without politicide, committed either through deportations or mass murder. It seems that those targeted for conversion were only apolitical Serbs and especially those married to Catholics.

Conversions were committed either individually or in masses. For example, in a case of Prijedor region, in late August 1941, there were 15,000 Orthodox peasants requesting to convert to Catholicism.¹⁷² Knowing their lives were at stake, and considering conversions as a way of saving themselves, many Serbs opted for this. Therefore, mass conversions were a common practice. According to the available data 30,341 Serbs were converted, and 63,334 officially applied for conversions to Catholicism by the end of the year. However, these numbers only include preserved documents from 73 districts out of total 142 in NDH, meaning that the number could easily be doubled.¹⁷³ Some historians, like Jozo Tomasevich estimated that the total number of converts from Orthodox to Catholic religion could easily be 250,000.¹⁷⁴

In reality, the conversion itself did not have much of an effect neither on the Serbs, nor on the Ustashe movement. Many Serbs converted only because they thought that it would bring them peace and equality. Naturally, the Serbs did not accept the Croatian iden-

¹⁷⁰ Krizman. *NDH između Hitler i Mussolinija*, 120. See also Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 83.

¹⁷¹ Croatian State Archive, Presidency of the Government of NDH, box 1/212, file: Secret reports 30.12.1941-16.03.1945.

¹⁷² Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 85.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 91-2.

¹⁷⁴ Tomasevich. *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 408.

tity after conversion, nor did they lose their ethnicity. It was naïve to expect that in a short period of time and under pressure, a regime could miraculously assimilate such a huge proportion of already disappointed and distrustful Serbian population. Moreover, the Serbs had no reason to honestly accept assimilation into the Croatian nation, because the Ustashe regime and the state were taking so much from them, and gave them basically nothing in return.

Although the Catholic Church by its nature welcomed conversions to Catholicism from any side, it had many objections to the policy aimed against the Serbs. In practice, Catholic Church had serious issues with the Ustashe authorities interfering in Church matters. In July 1941, even the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac felt the need to intervene. He sent a lengthy message to Pavelić himself, in which he condemned the crimes over all ethnic minorities and declared his concern about the fact that “among recent deportees there have been converts to Catholicism, so that it is my duty to concern myself with them, (...), seeing in human beings the image of God; human and Christian consideration should be shown especially to the weak, old people, young, innocent children and the sick.”¹⁷⁵ Higher clergy resisted the policy of forced conversions. Bishop conference held in November 1941, made a resolution condemning the force used in conversions, claiming that “into the Catholic church can only be accepted those who, without any coercion, completely free-willingly convert to Catholicism out of inner belief and conviction of truthfulness of the Catholic religion.”¹⁷⁶

For the large number of the Ustashe, and especially the paramilitary forces like the Wild Ustashe, recent conversion of the Serbs did not change their beliefs. For them they still remain the Serbs, and had to be destroyed anyway. Furthermore, there was a number of pro-

¹⁷⁵ Steinberg, *Types of Genocide*, 183.

¹⁷⁶ Matković, *Povijest NDH*, 127.

tests regarding the conversion policies from the lower-ranked Ustashe to the central authorities, and one of them reported that he knows “that Jews and Serbs are converted to the Roman Catholic faith out of fear, and for speculative reasons, I hereby ask that for the time being, you halt these acts [of conversion] because they would not be in the interest of the Ustashe movement.”¹⁷⁷ Another Ustashe official in his complaint added that conversions “serve only their [Serbian and Jewish] goal of masking and concealing [themselves]”.¹⁷⁸ The proof that the Ustashe on the field did not follow the instructions on how to treat converts is best demonstrated in an example from the Vrbas district in Bosnia where, in 1941, a Ustasha poster stated:

Former Serbs! On Thursday, June 12 when the Ustashe were escorting food to the hungry people, they were intercepted by the Chetniks and fired upon. Because of that attack, fourteen of these former Serbs were captured and shot on the spot.¹⁷⁹

Soon, rumors started to circulate about how the Serbs are getting slaughtered in spite of the fact that they converted to Catholicism, and this brought further distrust to the policy of the conversions. One local Ustashe official reported that “the [Serb] population believed that even with conversion to another faith, they will be unable to alter their position or to avoid eventual legal sanctions, which will be, or are being, enacted against the Jews.”¹⁸⁰ The Serbs in other parts of Croatia apparently thought similarly, and another report from Karlovac stated that the Serbs “are saying that even if they convert, this would do them no good, because the Orthodox in one place announced their intention to convert, came to convert, and were all killed.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 104-5.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁷⁹ Korb, *Understanding Ustaša Violence*, 8.

¹⁸⁰ Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 102.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 103.

The attitude towards conversions from inside the Ustashe movement represents yet another ideological clash between its members. On the one hand there were assimilationists who argued for the inclusion of at least a part of the Serbs into the nation, under the condition that they abandon the Serbian culture, accept the Croatian, and show their allegiance to NDH. On the other hand there were exclusionists who leaned towards the racist view of the Serbs, describing them as an alien and foreign element, racially different from the Croats, because they were Vlachs.¹⁸² Exclusionist views on the Serbian question varied: some preferred deportations, others extermination, but both their views were undoubtedly eliminationist.¹⁸³

This shows genocidal tendencies of the Ustashe on the field, who readily embraced, absorbed and implemented genocidal policies, something they were encouraged to do after the proclamation of the state. Therefore, no conversion or assimilation would have stopped a part of the Ustashe in their dedication to annihilate the Serbian population from the territory of NDH.

¹⁸² Vlachs were ancient people from Balkan who are considered to be decedents of the Illyrians. Most of them later on adopted Orthodoxy, however, there were also Catholic Vlachs. The Ustashe racial theoreticians considered Vlachs as racially *undesirable*. Bartulin, *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 76.

¹⁸³ Biondhich, *Religion and Nation*, 112.

Chapter III. Opening the Ustashe Pandora's box: Policy of Wild Ethnic cleansing in NDH

The image of the Ideal Ustashe

Before they came to power, the Ustashe did not have an organized mass-movement, nor did they have a significantly developed party infrastructure they could rely on. Since the movement itself was fairly small, it did not establish the hierarchy or necessary experience to wield a larger organization, especially not the organization such as a state.¹⁸⁴ When they took power in NDH in April 1941, Ante Pavelić the leader of the Ustashe, came from a long emigration in Italy together with approximately 200 emigrant-Ustashe.¹⁸⁵ Pavelić could additionally rely on approximately 900 home-grown Ustashe.¹⁸⁶ The total number of the Ustashe at the moment of ascending to power is estimated somewhere between 1,000-2,000 members.

Such a small number of the Ustashe, without an organized hierarchy had to leave an enormous amount of autonomy in decision-making to the individual Ustashe on the field. There were three critical tasks which needed their immediate attention; firstly, the Ustashe had to *subdue the existing power structure* to their will; secondly, they had to *eliminate any potential resistance* from all sides, and thirdly, they had to secure the *dominant political position* of the Ustashe movement on the territory of NDH.

¹⁸⁴ Mario Jareb is a historian who conducted extensive research on the pre-war Ustashe writes that the uprising of nationalists, just before the Germans entered Zagreb and on other places in Croatia, was dominantly spontaneous, uncoordinated from any Ustashe center. Jareb. *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 574-5.

¹⁸⁵ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 336.

¹⁸⁶ Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 92. Slavko Kvaternik claims that at the height of their (pre-war) power, just before the assassination on King Alexander in 1934, the Ustashe had around 900 members. They never exceeded this number during the pre-war time, but only when they gained power. Tomasevich sets the number at no more than 900 sworn home-Ustashe at the moment of the proclamation of NDH, adding to it 200 from Italy. Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, 337. Matković cautiously mentions the number of 2000 Ustashe at the time when they came to power. Matković, *Povijest NDH*, 50. The Ustashe themselves estimated that the number of their sympathizers was somewhere between 30-40 000 at the moment of coming to power, however this estimate is a highly problematic one, due to the issue of determining what is the Ustashe sympathizer. Moreover, there is a grave difficulty in determining the number of sympathizers because there were no opinion polls nor did the pro-Ustashe groups participate in elections of any sort. See Korb, *Understanding Ustaša Violence*, 9.

In order to *secure a dominant political position*, compared to other political organizations, the Ustashe had to increase their numbers and reduce the number of members of other political parties, especially the Croatian Peasant Party.¹⁸⁷ In order to attract as many members from all social levels, the Ustashe did not have high requirements for entering the movement. Therefore, in the first months of NDH's existence, the potential recruits only had to prove that they concur with the Ustashe in principle, meaning that they had to accept Pavelić as their superior, the Ustashe movement as a permanent political factor, and to demonstrate loyalty to NDH. Regarding this issue, a German informer Artur Haeffner wrote in his report, on 23 April 1941, just 13 days after the Ustashe came to power, that "the Ustashe movement found many new recruits, because for the acceptance into the Ustashe they do not care about the moral character of the people, so that in their ranks one can find the worst scum."¹⁸⁸

From the perspective of new recruits into the Ustashe, the membership in the movement was an attractive opportunity for various reasons. Since the movement was initially significantly understaffed, the new recruits could advance fairly quickly on almost all positions. With the new positions, and fast promotions came an easy way to seize power, influence and money, undeniable motivation for many who decided to join the Ustashe movement. However, many joined because of their idealism, led by the motto *better some sort of Croatia than no Croatia at all*, meaning that it was not essential for them to completely concur with the ideology or the acts of the Ustashe movement itself, but they were rather willing to bend the knee for the greater ideal.¹⁸⁹ Many Croatian nationalists who were persecuted because of their political attitudes and ideals could now finally belong somewhere. Led by the initial enthusiasm surrounding the establishment of the long-wished NDH, they

¹⁸⁷ In Croatian Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka.

¹⁸⁸ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 140.

¹⁸⁹ Bartulin, *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 171.

willingly joined the ranks of the Ustashe movement, but many of these nationalists led by ideals would soon be gravely disappointed.

The policy of recruitment into the Ustashe movement was a major success. In less than eight months in power, by the end of 1941 the membership in the Ustashe movement rose from initial 1,000-2,000 members to approximately 150,000 members.¹⁹⁰

With the rapid increase in numbers, a far larger one than could be trained by the older members, the Ustashe started to openly propagate their views of the ideal Ustashe which new members had to follow. The overall image of the ideal Ustashe in the period of the early reign was that he had to be a fearless warrior, a man who acts without asking many questions, active and energetic, with strong emphasis on aggressiveness and personal initiative. A similar image of the ideal Ustashe was given already in the pre-war period by radical nationalist students who, in 1936, said that *new man* is a warrior, manly, militarily educated, of rugged heart, steely will and iron discipline. He perceived life as a struggle, most notably between good and evil. In such a depiction there was no room for compromise with the enemies.¹⁹¹

The group which was especially prone to recruitment in the ranks of the Ustashe, and who took the newly established ideal most seriously were the nationalist youth. Rebellious and idealistic in their thought, they craved for belonging after years of exclusion in the Yugoslav ideological framework. The youth was especially attracted by the rhetoric of fanaticism, revolution, sudden change, comradesly, asserting themselves in the world, and rebelling against the old. The old was identified with remnants of the previous system, democracy, liberalism, multiculturalism and passivity. The Ustashe themselves propagated fanaticism and youthful rebellion as aims of further attracting the youth to their ranks. But what

¹⁹⁰ Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 12.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 129.

was really attractive to both youthful nationalists and the Ustashe is the idea of rejuvenation through revolution.¹⁹² As will be discussed later in this chapter, rejuvenation through violence and revolution are two phrases which can best summarize the first months of the Ustashe reign.

It seems that there was a persistent stereotype among certain Serbs about the Croats as pacifists, intellectuals and poets.¹⁹³ The Ustashe were dissatisfied by this and propagated a counter-ideal. Therefore, pacifism and passivity were also identified as something which was old and had to be annihilated. Living in the age of conflicts and surrounded with war which was already raging throughout Europe, the violence for the Ustashe, as well as other fascist organizations, became a natural way of expressing political ideals. Thus, the idea of rejuvenating the nation was to be accomplished mainly through the extensive use of violence. The ideal of violence as a means of solving social and political issues was not something specific to the Ustashe in this period but, as Michael Mann claims, it was something generally accepted as an ideal by all fascist organizations.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, Mann argues that the dynamic relationship between youthful members and the older ones is best established exactly through violence, and is something we can encounter in many cases of mass murder.¹⁹⁵ Violence was therefore a way of bonding, and one might say communicating, through which class difference, age or ideological disagreement simply disappeared. It became an effective way of promoting comradeship among new recruits and older members of the Ustashe movement.

When violence in the propaganda turned into mass murder throughout the territory of NDH, many newcomers to the Ustashe movement who did not completely adapt to the ideological aims of the movement started complaining. Therefore the current ideal of the

¹⁹² Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 83.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 128.

¹⁹⁴ Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 8-9.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

new Ustashe needed an additional clause - silence. In one of the articles in a mainstream Ustashe newspaper it was stated that there is an old saying which states “to speak is like silver, to remain silent is like gold. The Ustashe say that talking is weakness, and very often evil, and to remain silent is a virtue. Working and fighting are the main activities.”¹⁹⁶ Violence and mass murder were something that had to be practiced, but to talk about it was not permitted and making complaints about it was a sign of weakness, and considered to be *evil*.

Finally, the Ustashe were no longer satisfied solely with the increase in numbers of their ranks but were striving for total control, compliance and participation of the population. In mid-September Poglavnik made a public speech in which he proclaimed that all Croats had to actively collaborate with the Ustashe for the good of the homeland. Those who do not do so are “worth NOTHING [capitals in the original]”.¹⁹⁷

The initial image of the ideal Ustashe who is supposed to be aggressive, violent, active, energetic, and a man who relies on his own initiative, had a particular function in the first months of the Ustashe rule. Promotion of such ideals was seen as essential for them to stay in power, since their numbers were low and a sophisticated way of planning, reaction and passing orders did not exist. Therefore, there was a significant level of autonomy in decision-making given to the Ustashe working on the field.¹⁹⁸ This way of operating was applied to both the old-Ustashe and new recruits, and led to a significant amount of arbitrariness in implementing policies on the field. Such guidelines became a prerequisite for appearance of the so called Wild Ustashe, bands of citizens who played a significant role in ethnic cleansing on the territory of NDH.

¹⁹⁶ *Hrvatski narod*, “Ustaše su šutjeli,” no. 117, 11 June 1941.

¹⁹⁷ *Hrvatski naord*, “Odlučne riječi Poglavnika,” no. 217, 19 September, 5.

¹⁹⁸ *Hrvatski narod*, “Poglavnik učvršćuje temelje NDH,” no. 137, 1 July, 1.

The Wild Ustashe: Terminology and Typology

The narrow sense of the term Wild Ustashe

In the *narrow sense* of the term, the Wild Ustashe were armed groups of people who appeared all over the territory of NDH and committed crimes of robbery, mass murder, individual murder and ethnic cleansing. The term itself was used by the regime in the press, as well as in personal correspondence or military and secret service reports from the field. The term “Wild” can be understood in two different ways. On the one hand it was influenced by savage ways of murder and treatment of their victims, most often killed in cold blood by knives and axes. On the other hand, the term “Wild” was used by the regime because the Wild Ustashe did not formally belong in the hierarchy of the movement, but were rather locally organized and closest to what we would call auxiliary units. I will try to avoid the term unit because it implies that the Wild Ustashe had a certain organizational structure and that they were long-standing units, which does not correspond with the facts. In many cases they were disbanded as fast as they were assembled. Most often they were organized as crowds, resembling groups which participate in pogroms; therefore the term groups is more accurate in referring to the Wild Ustashe.

The wider sense of the term Wild Ustashe

However, the term Wild Ustashe can also be understood in a *wider sense* embracing both *sworn*¹⁹⁹ and *un-sworn* Ustashe who did not officially comply with the law of NDH. It can also include the regular Ustashe units which did not comply with a direct order or simply took their own autonomous actions, such as mass murder. Another term used by the Ustashe regime, that can be understood as belonging to a subgroup of the Wild Ustashe in a wider

¹⁹⁹ Under the term *sworn* Ustashe I consider those members who went through the regular procedure of entering into the Ustashe movement, including a background check, and a ritual of acceptance which consists of swearing the Ustashe oath. The full text of the Ustashe oath can be found on Miljenko Hajdarović. “Ustaška prisega (zakletva),” *Hrvatski povijesni portal*, published on 2 March 2007. <http://povijest.net/ustaska-prisega-zakletva/>, last accessed on 2 June 2015.

sense was *Nastashe*²⁰⁰, who were blamed in the press for all the misdeeds which were tied to the regime. They were described as careerists who were capable for anything if it is was useful for their well-being. Most often *Nastashe* were accused of corruption, disloyalty, softness, and betrayal of the Ustashe ideals. However, the term *Nastashe* was mostly used in the press, meaning it was probably invented only as a fictive term which can be used for scapegoating for all the troubles appearing within the Ustashe ranks.²⁰¹

The voluntarily recruited Wild Ustashe

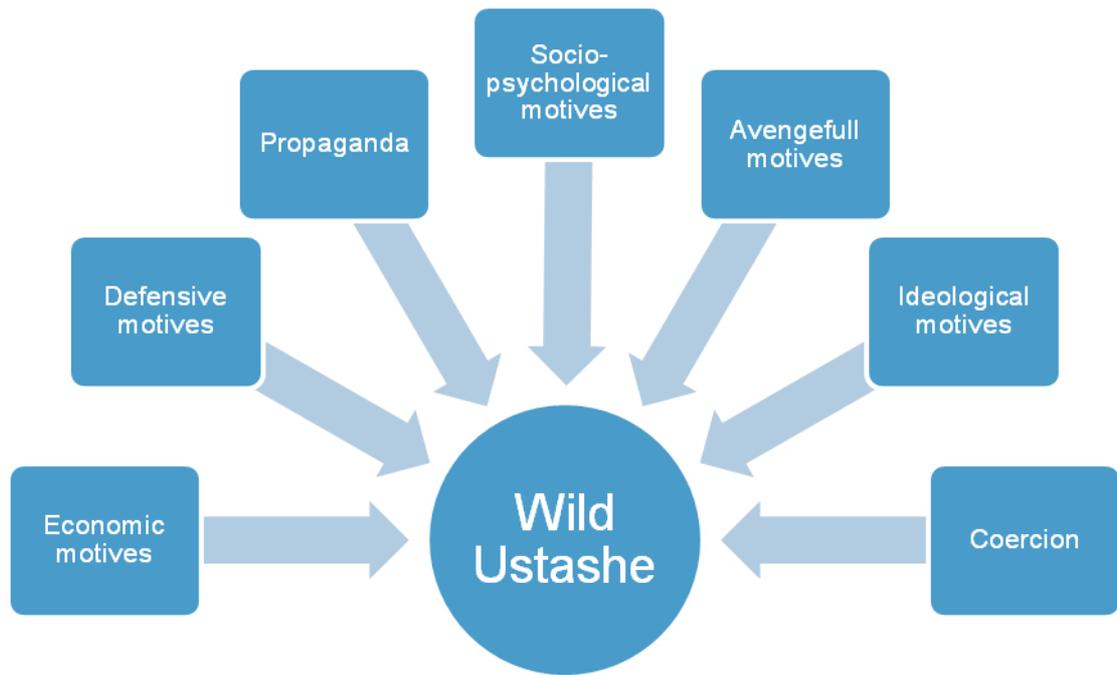
In essence, the Wild Ustashe were a grass-root movement, meaning that they were in largest part appearing on a local level and a local initiative.²⁰² Such a way of organizing armed groups draws continuity from the period of the immediate forming of NDH. During the April War (6-18 April 1941), there were multiple groups of nationalists who rose all over the territory of what would be NDH, in attempts to disarm the routed units of the Yugoslav Army. After being defeated in combat by the invading German, Hungarian or Italian troops, many units of the Yugoslav Army found themselves demoralized, cut-off, and without supplies. The local anti-Yugoslav oriented citizens organized themselves and disarmed these units. Essentially, there was no central administration or leaders who organized them, or gave them an order to do so, they participated in disarming and combat with the Yugoslavs on a local level, and very often the operational area of these groups did not exceed a single village.²⁰³ The Wild Ustashe were assembled in similar ways, but motives for their recruitment varied greatly from case to case.

²⁰⁰ The term *Nastashe* is a combination of Croatian words *nastati* (to become) and *ustaša* (meaning insurgent). In reality it marks those individuals who joined the Ustashe ranks immediately after they came to power, not because they believe in their ideology, but because they craved power, money and influence. In one word refers to careerists.

²⁰¹ *Hrvatski narod*, "Ustaše i oni drugi," No. 160, date: 24 July 1941, 4.

²⁰² I use the term Wild Ustashe in this paper predominantly in the *narrow sense*, however when I use it in *wider sense* it will be noted.

²⁰³ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 92-3, 311.



The economic motives were reappearing in almost all cases of presence of the Wild Ustashe. For example, a commander of a police station reported on one of the actions of the Wild Ustashe that the local Ustashe “participated in cleansing a few days ago, and carried some things from the abandoned houses of the Orthodox residents, so that the commander of the station could have only sealed the abandoned apartments.”²⁰⁴ In an action around Korička jama, the regular Ustashe, accompanied by the Wild Ustashe, massacred over 150 Serbs, afterwards throwing them into the local pits and robbing their houses of any valuables. One of the most important valuables of the agricultural society was the cattle, and only on this occasion the Ustashe took 5,294 pieces of smaller and larger animals.²⁰⁵

In war-time, when materials were scarce, food production low, and future uncertain, many found an easy way to secure their material existence or general well-being in compar-

²⁰⁴ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 301, R.S. Prs. 1941 2339-15061, Ng. jur. Br. 10086, R.S. Prs. 2339/41, date: 12 August 1941, 2.

²⁰⁵ Dedijer. *The Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 162-3.

ison to other citizens. Stealing material goods was an easy way of making fast profits through reselling, or if they were not sold they were used as bribes. Moreover, cattle theft was a reoccurring motive in predominantly agricultural societies. It had a double function, either as a means of securing existence of those who stole it, because of the natural goods they could extract from animals (like milk and eggs), but it also had a role in securing that ethnically cleansed territories stay that way. The cattle was literally called *treasure* at the time, meaning that it was the single most important possession of a peasant family, because the land could not be labored without it.²⁰⁶ Thus, robbing the local population of their cattle was equal to eliminating their basic source of income and food, and effectively forcing them to move elsewhere or die, creating an effective way of ethnic cleansing conducted by the Wild Ustashe.

Revenge as a personal motivator for participation in the crimes against the victims was also probably present among most of the Wild Ustashe groups, but it was not dominant in all cases. For example, on 3 August 1941, a group of four self-organized Muslims, armed themselves and came to a village of Omarska in which they “killed a Greek-easterner [Serb]²⁰⁷, and then bashed through the doors of other Greek-easterners [Serbs] in the village and shattered everything inside their apartments.”²⁰⁸ The report concludes that the motive for such a crime was personal revenge. On another occasion, in the already mentioned crime in Korička jama, a man joined the murderous crowd which killed over 150 Serbs as an act of revenge for his murdered father. His father, Šukrija Tanović had been murdered by a Serbian band after the First World War.²⁰⁹ These cases of personal revenge illustrate how

²⁰⁶ Blago, literally meaning treasure, was a Croatian and Serbian word which was commonly used when referring to cattle. Nowadays the word is preserved in some of the Croatian dialects.

²⁰⁷ Since the name Serbian-Orthodoxy religion was forbidden by the Ustashe, the new name for their religion was Greek-Orthodox.

²⁰⁸ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 303, without number or further classification, a document dated to 4 August 1941.

²⁰⁹ Dedijer. *The Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 160.

quickly the involved individuals were able to internalize hatred towards individuals into hatred towards the whole ethnic group. Under the influence of the Ustasha propaganda it was not only permissible, but encouraged to generalize negative behavior of individual Serbs into an image of all the Serbs. In this way, the personal revenge became projected towards the whole out-group. Thus, the Ustashe hoped to achieve that hatred towards the Serbs becomes a norm of social behavior in NDH, and the acts against the Serbs a way of demonstrating loyalty to the state.

Socio-Psychological explanations can be used as a complementary explanation for the appearance of the Wild Ustashe. One of the most famous works regarding the psychological explanations for the rise of authoritarian regimes is a book written by Adorno and his associates, titled *The Authoritarian Personality*. Adorno identified different types of authoritarian syndromes of which a personality might suffer. Those suffering from these syndromes are especially prone to commit crimes and murder under special circumstances, such as the rise of the fascist regime. For example, those suffering from authoritarian syndrome are affected by the blind belief in authority and are ready to “attack those who are deemed weak and who are socially acceptable as ‘victims’.”²¹⁰ Applied to the case of NDH, the Ustashe elites and officials clearly stated which groups were acceptable as victims. Through their propaganda they targeted the Jews, Serbs and Roma, and clearly gave “green light” for persecution through many statements and acts of legislature. Population prone to what Adorno calls authoritarian syndrome followed instructions given by the authorities.

Moreover, Adorno introduces the category of “The Rebel and a Psychopath” who enjoys persecution directed against helpless victims and it encompasses “all those who do the “dirty work” of a fascist movement.”²¹¹ A more detailed description of this category is

²¹⁰ Theodor Adorno. *The Authoritarian personality* (New York: Norton, 1993), 361.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 365.

given by Robert M. Linder who wrote that a rebel and psychopath is “not only a criminal; he is the embryonic Storm-Trooper; he is the disinherited, betrayed antagonism whose aggression can be mobilized on the instant at which the properly-aimed and frustration-evoking formula is communicated by the leader under whose tinselled aegis license becomes law, secret and primitive desires become virtuous ambitions readily attained, and compulsive behavior formerly deemed punishable becomes the order of the day.”²¹² Rise of the Wild Ustashe can be plausibly explained through the given category. By giving “green light” to the population regarding the persecution of Serbs, the authorities created an atmosphere of laissez-faire on violence against them. This fact is best illustrated in a speech given by Aleksandar Seitz, chief-secretary of the Croatian government who encouraged the population not to be afraid because “Jews and Serbs will never come back, nor those who may serve them. Serbs and Jews cannot exist anymore, nor will they, that is guaranteed by the Croatian military and by the Croatian Ustashe.”²¹³

By consuming the often repeated hate-speeches given by the leading Ustashe, population simply disregarded the law, because the statements of the officials were contrary to the law itself. Therefore, the groups of the Wild Ustashe simply gave more credibility to the leaders of the institutions than to the institutions themselves. Those joining the Wild Ustashe were quite right regarding this assumption, because the Ustashe protected those who committed crimes against Serbs, as will be demonstrated later on in this chapter. Furthermore, under the influence of the propaganda, on how a new Ustasha man is supposed to act, they followed the ideal by being autonomous, energetic, aggressive and showing initiative. The Wild Ustashe thought that they were simply following the given instructions on what is expected of them by the highest authority in the state.

²¹² As quoted in Adorno, *Authoritarian personality*, 366.

²¹³ *Hrvatski narod*, “Veliki govor prof. Seitz,” no. 130, 24 June 1941.

Defensive measures were deemed necessary by a large part of the population in the given period. Therefore, the Wild Ustashe units also assembled in certain cases in which the Army or the regular Ustashe could not protect them against the appearance of the Chetnik or Partisan formations. This was the case in ethnically diverse areas, especially with greater number of Serbian than the Croatian inhabitants. Being afraid that the Chetniks might demonstrate vengefulness on ordinary population because of the Ustashe crimes, many *ordinary citizens* organized themselves and took arms. Although some of them must have remained strictly defensive units, many such groups actually turned into the Wild Ustashe and participated in crimes. Armed and full of fear they must have been particularly prone to manipulation by the local Ustashe who induced them to commit crimes through rumors of atrocities committed against neighboring villages and therefore inducing vengefulness among them and effectively turning them into the Wild Ustashe.²¹⁴ This is proved by reports given to the Ministry of Interior, filled with cases where armed villagers formed the Wild Ustashe groups in order to commit crimes, either after real reports of Chetnik attacks or based on rumors of their appearance. For example on 9 August, thirty gendarmes were joined by forty villagers who signed up as volunteers to go to a pursuit of Chetniks.²¹⁵ On another occasion, around the city of Mostar fifteen gendarmes were accompanied by twenty local villagers, again to go to a pursuit of attacking Chetniks.²¹⁶ Reports like these reappear quite often in the archival material of the Ministry of Interior.

The threat from Chetniks was indeed real. However, it is worth noting that their numbers grew considerably after the ruthless treatment of Serbs during first months of the Ustashe being in power. According to Slavko Kvaternik, the number of Chetniks rose to

²¹⁴ Kosić-Kolaović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 205.

²¹⁵ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 303, political overview without further classification.

²¹⁶ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 301, R.S. 1941 5297-68972, R.S. 65007/41, document dated on 5 December 1941.

approximately 50,000 armed men during the summer of 1941.²¹⁷ This was a reaction to maltreatment, and not the other way around. However, Chetniks, similarly to the Wild Ustashe, also committed crimes of retribution against the Croatian and Muslim population. Historian Alexander Korb noted that Chetnik massacres over the Muslims in eastern Bosnia alone took more than 100,000 lives by the year 1942.²¹⁸

There were many groups of the Wild Ustashe who were self-organized, without any mediation of the Ustashe officials. However, judging by the available sources, most of them were organized by clear encouragement of the authorities. A prime example of the Wild Ustashe created with mediation of the Ustashe officers appeared in Slunj in July, when the officer Vital Boljak came to Slunj with a truck filled with 400 guns and started to look for volunteers for another big action against the Serbs. He did not report to any local administration and did this without their compliance. One local approached him and said he would like to help, and then the “snowball” effect came into being. The one man who volunteered recommended a couple of more and fetched them, and this happened again and again until a couple of dozen volunteers were assembled. The local Ustashe official protested against such recruitment and sent telegrams to Pavelić and to the governor of the region, but no answer ever came through. Then he decided to go to Zagreb to stop the action, but while he was on the way, most of the Slunj Serbs were already killed and thrown into local pits. When they ethnically cleansed the town of Slunj, the Wild Ustashe went into local villages with purpose of further continuing their murderous campaign.²¹⁹ These Wild Ustashe continued their bloody crusade and from 29 July to 8 August killed somewhere between 1500 and 1600 Serbs.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 206.

²¹⁸ Korb, *Understanding Ustaša Violence*, 11.

²¹⁹ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 312.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 314.

Coerced recruitment of the Wild Ustashe

Although the largest part of the Wild Ustashe was recruited voluntarily, there were cases in which such groups were created under coercion. According to the testimony of an eyewitness, right after Ante Klarić became a priest in his village in Domaljevac he was propagating that all men should join the Ustashe movement. When no volunteers appeared he held a sermon in a church and threatened that anyone who does not join the Ustashe movement would be killed. Eyewitness continues his testimony by saying that “right away, about 200 young men joined the Ustasha out of fear, whereas previous to this, no one from our village was with the Ustasas. Moreover, people believed the priest, and many unknowing people joined them and became real criminals. He specifically persuaded many to commit crimes against the Serbian people.”²²¹ Another element in this picture which should not be overlooked is the importance of the priest as the religious and moral leader on a local level, and therefore a role-model for many citizens. Priests’ authority, or in other cases the authority of prominent people on the local level such as mayors and schoolteachers were seen as source of moral guidance, role-models in what is right and what is wrong, and most importantly what is socially acceptable. Many Wild Ustashe groups were organized under such patronage.

The first appearances of the Wild Ustashe

The first appearances of the Wild Ustashe, whether in a *narrow* or *wider* sense of the term, can be dated back to the first days of the Ustashe being in power. Slavko Kvaternik, among the highest Ustashe circles since the formation of NDH, claims that the first crimes commit-

²²¹ Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 211.

ted by the Ustashe happened immediately after they came back from emigration. These crimes were most often requisition of apartments, especially the Jewish ones.²²²

The Jews were the primary target because the Ustashe either knew exactly that the Jews would soon be targeted through the Ustashe legislation, or, if they did not know it for sure, they knew how the Germans treated them and could guess that, sooner or later, a similar fate awaited the Croatian Jewry. Therefore, they were simply ahead of the legislation. In the beginning some Ustashe were robbing people of their private possessions only in places where the Ustashe firmly held power, primarily in the capital. When they came back from emigration, in which some spent more than twelve years, many felt entitled to economic rewards, primarily apartments. Some Ustashe kept their eyes on certain luxurious apartments in the elite parts of Zagreb and simply threw people out of them, especially if the owners were the Jews or Serbs. For example, the Ustashe press brought reports as of 20 April, about the groups which could be clearly characterized as the Wild Ustashe. On this date, there was a warning issued to “all the Ustashe and to the public that some group of people with a Croatian flag and letters of the Ustashe over their hand appeared in two cases and took over some possessions from the citizens. It was warned that this was not done by the Ustashe, but some shady people, who only want to use the (chaotic) circumstances.”²²³

Some legalist-oriented Ustashe protested against such practices of arbitrary plunder and retaking of apartments in Zagreb. When these protests reached Pavelić, his allegedly highly influential wife simply responded that the emigrant-Ustashe deserved such rewards after twelve years of emigration spent in Italy.²²⁴

Besides these appearances of the Wild Ustashe in the wider sense of the word, the Wild Ustashe groups apparently appeared simultaneously. The first mass murders commit-

²²² Kisić-Kolanović. *Vojskovođa i politika*, 202.

²²³ *Hrvatski narod*, “Upozorenje svim Ustašama i pučanstvu,” no. 67, 20 April 1941, 7.

²²⁴ Kisić-Kolanović. *Vojskovođa i politika*, 173.

ted by the Ustashe in general were in a village of Gudovac, where the Ustashe killed 184 Serbs on 27 April. Soon after, they killed 250 villagers in Blagaj, and on 11 May killed around 300 Serbs in Glina.²²⁵ Although all these murderous campaigns were given a blessing by some high ranking Ustashe like Eugen Dido Kvaternik and Maks Luburić, and saw presence of the primarily regular Ustashe, it seems that quite a number of auxiliary units were used, which were created *ad hoc* out of the local population, forming the first Wild Ustashe groups.²²⁶ Slavko Kvaternik claimed that the groups of Wild Ustashe, like those already mentioned, started to appear all over the territory of NDH and very soon started to work on their own initiative. The highest circles reacted mildly towards their appearance, and ascribed it to the local acts of revenge which would not happen again. Kvaternik reported that some high official Ustashe found them useful and protected them, especially Pavelić, thinking they would be able to organize the Wild Ustashe and disband them whenever they wanted.²²⁷

But the Wild Ustashe were not only something that was tolerated or deemed useful by the regime - they were considered essential. As noted earlier, the Ustashe were seriously understaffed and primarily lacked military units, because the army was just being created and was not actually put into effect yet. Therefore, reliance on voluntarily (or forcefully) formed auxiliary units in the form of the Wild Ustashe was essential for establishing control and conducting operations of repression. Therefore, through the creation of the Wild Ustashe the regime received *operative assistance*, *pool of new recruits*, and *increased cohesion through fear of retribution*. Out of these three reasons which are shared by both the voluntarily organized Wild Ustashe, and those organized through coercion, the most important one for coerced formations is the *increased cohesion through fear of retribution*. Since they

²²⁵ Krizman. *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 124-5.

²²⁶ Kisić-Kolanović. *Vojskovođa i politika*, 205.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 205.

participated in crimes of mass murder, willingly or unwillingly, the Wild Ustashe bounded their fate with that of the regime itself. Since they were delegated by the movement to commit violence, the Ustashe were the only ones who could actually protect them from retribution of the returning Serbs, either in the form of Partisans or Chetniks. Moreover, they probably knew that they would be persecuted by the Croats who resisted the regime and the policies of ethnic cleansing after the war ended, if they would be on the losing side. Thus, although they were forced to commit crimes, they were bound to dedicate themselves to the causes of the Ustashe, because their lives depended on the *life-span* of the movement itself.

“The Vujčić affair” – the case which split the Ustashe leadership

The Wild Ustashe were essential in the first months of the regime, for conducting the “dirty work” of the certain Ustashe warlords, because they did not have any regular Ustashe units at their disposal. The Wild Ustashe were even used for intervening in the private matters of certain Ustashe officials. For example on 5 May, five young nationalists killed three Serbs in Karlovac. There are serious indications that one of the murdered people, a lawyer Milan Vujčić, had some compromising information about Ante Nikšić, a newly appointed governor of the region.²²⁸ After the bodies of the three murdered Serbs were found in the nearby woods, there was a discussion in the local Ustashe office on what to do, and at least three officials were arguing that there should be a detailed and objective investigation. Other five members of the office, including Ante Nikšić were against it. All the men in the office knew who the murderers were because the wife of the murdered Milan Vujčić was present when he was taken away.²²⁹

Vladimir Židovec, one of the three leading Ustashe who insisted on the investigation and arrest of the perpetrators, went to Zagreb, and met the deputy of the Minister of Interior,

²²⁸ Slavko Goldstein. *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 83.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 75-81.

Stjepan Vukovac, to insist on the arrest. Deputy Vukovac, facing numerous similar complaints and cases of the Ustashe and Wild Ustashe self-willingness, decided to take action and to make a complaint to Andrija Artuković, the Minister of Internal Affairs.²³⁰ Vukovac met with minister Artuković, and Eugen Dido Kvaternik one of the most important people in the Ustashe movement at the time. Kvaternik held many offices regarding security services, and was also one of Artuković's deputies. Kvaternik spoke first about the necessity of a revolution, ascribing to the view that the Ustashe should not be punished for the use of arbitrary of violence. Vukovac elaborated on his viewpoint insisting on legality, and establishment of law and order in NDH. Minister Artuković, who had the final say in the matter, responded by saying that "both of you are necessary to me! You, Dido represent an extreme, and that is radicalism and revolution, and you Vukovac represent another extreme, and that is strict legality and reasonability. In this way you are complementary, and as much as you do not stand each other, you are exactly what I need, in this way I can go along the golden middle."²³¹

In accordance with Artuković's *golden middle* principle, four of the murderers were eventually arrested, and released the next morning with advice not to show up in Karlovac for some time, because the rumors of how they murdered those three Serbs were already circulating in the city.²³² The ringleader of young assassins was taken into service by Kvaternik, and sent for further education in Germany where he started to work for Abwehr during the war. This is how the punishment under the *golden middle* principle, established by Artuković, looked like.²³³ Stjepan Vukovac, a representative of *strict legality and reasonability* resigned a month later in June 1941, and asked for an early retirement; he was 46

²³⁰ Slavko Goldstein, 1941. *Godina koja se vraća*, 85.

²³¹ Ibid, 87.

²³² Ibid, 116-7.

²³³ Ibid, 132.

years old and never held any office under the Ustasha regime.²³⁴ Cases like the “Vujčić affair” were in no sense an exception or a particular curiosity; Slavko Goldstein writes that they were a common thing at the end of April and especially during May. Politicide of the Serbs has started, and arrests and murders of the prominent Serbs were already well under way.²³⁵

The “Vujčić affair” revealed a greater conflict among the ranks of the Ustashe than it might seem at first. It was a conflict between the two conceptions of how NDH should be organized, and what the status of the Ustashe movement inside it should look like. It was essentially a conflict between *statist-oriented* and the *movement-oriented* Ustashe. The *statist-oriented* Ustashe were *classic* nationalists who believed in centralized state, powerful institutions, with no one above them except the leader, Poglavnik. This idea of radical nation-statism was the strongest among the Ustashe officials holding offices, and the military. According to the *movement-oriented* Ustashe, also characterized as paramilitarists, NDH was not supposed to be a state with the Ustashe in power, but they had a state and were outside its reach, it was in their service. This idea was primarily propagated by the emigrant Ustashe who formed Pavelić’s closest circle. They were operating under a parallel principle of governing, creating double institutions such as the separate Ustashe militia which was effectively not falling under regular army’s jurisdiction. The military and its generals were naturally against such arrangements, because it endangered their monopoly on violence. Furthermore they were protesting against self-willingness of the Ustashe militia because it caused rebellions which were endangering the military effort.

In the context of this power struggle, the Wild Ustashe were the biggest thorn in the eyes of the *statist-oriented* Ustashe, but on the other hand they were an experimental project

²³⁴ Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 424. See also Slavko Goldstein. 1941. *Godina koja se vraća*, 132.

²³⁵ Slavko Goldstein. 1941. *Godina koja se vraća*, 83.

of the *movement-oriented* Ustashe. Moreover, cases like the “Vujčić affair” showed that the Wild Ustashe enjoyed the support of the movement as long as they operated under the overall aims of the Ustashe elite; they received a blessing for the continuation of their *laissez-faire* on violence. By delegating the Wild Ustashe and the Ustashe militia to conduct mass violence against the Serbs as they wished, the paramilitarist-oriented leadership of the movement considerably weakened the state institutions. Such attitude caused further dissatisfaction among the state-organized Ustashe, a conflict which would quickly escalate as will be seen by the end of this chapter. It is important to note that the state-oriented Ustashe did not necessarily demand the stop on policy of ethnic cleansing, but wanted it to be committed as a system, led and organized through a framework of state institutions. They thought that the wild mass murder committed by the Wild Ustashe was not only ineffective, but that it caused more problems than benefits.

The Wild Ustashe and ethnic cleansing

The Wild Ustashe became one of the key tools in conducting ethnic cleansing through mass murder of the Serbs. They were stretching over 60 to 70% of the territory of NDH, making it considerably difficult to cleanse it through usage of only regular units of the Ustashe. Therefore, a certain degree of collaboration with the local population was wished for by the paramilitary-oriented Ustashe in order to radically resolve the “Serbian Question.” For example, the Ustasha official, Durić, surrounded by citizens in the village of Dvor, told them that they themselves had to choose between three options regarding the “Serbian Question” in their county: “conversion, deporting, or purging with *the iron broom*.”²³⁶ The Ustashe wanted to make direct collaborations with the ordinary citizens.

²³⁶ Dedijer. *The Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 184.

The Ustashe had no trouble in finding the recruits for the Wild Ustashe groups which cooperated with them. The Ustashe reports from the field are filled with reports on how the Wild Ustashe participated in actions of ethnic cleansing. For example, in one of the reports it is stated that on 9/10 August, “the Ustashe and armed villagers, the so-called Wild Ustashe, went towards the village of Ostrvica for the cleansing of the Serbs, who burned the houses of the local Croats a day earlier.”²³⁷ In another report it is claimed that around Slunj, an action of cleansing was organized after the Chetnik attack on a Ustashe column, and twenty armed citizens helped in it.²³⁸ What cleansing meant in the Ustashe jargon is best illustrated through a Ustashe report dated on 6 August, in which it is stated that “cleansing should be understood as destruction – murder and slaughter of the Serbs, without regards to their age or sex, and also as destruction of their property.”²³⁹ Reports like these became common during the summer of 1941, when the activity of the Wild Ustashe reached its peak. Armed villagers, which were actually the Wild Ustashe, became essential in conducting ethnic cleansing.

The Ustashe press proudly announced that “all over our villages there are thousands of peasant Ustashe who ask and beg to be sent to the battle against the sworn enemies [of Croatia]. The Croatian people have enough inner force to help the destruction of those [Serbs] who want to doom the culture and civilization.”²⁴⁰ According to Slavko Kvaternik, activities of the Wild Ustashe and their numbers quickly rose during June, July and August, finally reaching a total of 25,000-30,000 people under arms.²⁴¹ However, this number should be taken with great caution. This is due to the fact that the majority of the Wild Usta-

²³⁷ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 301, R.S. Prs. 1941 2339-15061, Ng. jur. Br. 10086, R.S. Prs. 2339/41, document dated on 12th August 1941, 2.

²³⁸ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 301, R.S. Prs. 1941 2339-15061, Ng. Jur. Br. 10098, Prs. 4821.

²³⁹ Slavko Goldstein, 1941. *Godina koja se vraća*, 316.

²⁴⁰ *Hrvatski narod*, “Konačni obračun s najvećim neprijateljem,” No. 176, date: 9 August 1941, 4.

²⁴¹ Kisić-Kolanović. *Vojskovođa i politika*, 206.

she were never formed as permanent units, but as groups which were often disbanded as soon as the action in which they participated was finished.

In addition to the Wild Ustashe in the *narrow* sense, there appeared a significant amount of *sworn* Ustashe who often decided to take actions of ethnic cleansing against the direct orders of their superiors. For example Major Petar Zelić, member of the Ustashe militia, who was positioned in Banja Luka, had strict orders not to move from the city with his unit, because his assignment was to protect the city of any potential danger. After receiving reports that Zelić committed crimes against Serbs around Banja Luka, the command asked him why he disregarded a direct order and participated in massacres. He answered that the city was in danger and asked “what would have happened if all those Serbs rose against us?” He implied that after the Serbs were dead, they could not partake in any rebellion.²⁴² Zelić’s attitude is in no way exception, but an official view towards a new morality propagated by the state. The philosophy behind it, which can clearly be seen through the official propaganda, is organizing *preventive* attack against the Serbs. It was repeated that the Serbs would destroy the Croats if they were not eliminated, and therefore every Serb, even without a weapon, was seen as a potential rebel against the state. In the Ustashe ideology, the Serbs were predetermined to slay the Croats, and therefore any attack on them, even if they were peaceful, was not only allowed, but encouraged.²⁴³

Becoming a Burden

The crimes of the Wild Ustashe became so widespread that they eventually evoked an all-out rebellion against the state by the Chetnik and Partisan armed formations which began in

²⁴² Obhodaš, et al. *Ustaška vojnica*, 81.

²⁴³ *Hrvatski narod*, “Urediti ćemo ovu državu kako propisuju ustaška načela,” No. 112, date: 06 June 1941, 3. In this issue of newspapers, a speech given by Milovan Žanić was published, in which he declared that *after everything that has happened, we know that they [the Serbs] will never wish us any good, nor will they think well of us. We, the Ustashe, know that until the Serbian question is solved, there will be trouble in this country of ours.*

July 1941. The Serbian population, facing harsh discrimination, arrests and arbitrary murder by the hand of the Ustashe, saw no other option than to take up arms against the state which gave them nothing and demanded for their complete disappearance. The Ustashe were well informed about how the Serbs felt. For example, in one of the reports given to the Ustashe Secret Service,²⁴⁴ it is stated that the Ustashe terrorized a population of one village although “the Greek-eastern [Serbian] people... behaved perfectly calm. They were not helping the Chetniks, since they were surrounded by the Croatian villages.”²⁴⁵ Moreover, the events of the Ustashe and the preceding attack on the jurisdiction of all the city offices, not only caused tremendous panic among the citizens of this village, but also among the residents of the surrounding villages.”²⁴⁶ Panic quickly turned into frustration with the regime, and after the Serbs saw that they could not do anything to stop the crimes of the Ustashe, they took arms.

It seems as the pillaging, robbery and crimes of the Wild Ustashe became such a widespread phenomenon that they even started to apply violence against the citizens of the German Reich. Eugen Kvaternik sent a telegram to all administrative bodies on 20 October 1941, regarding this issue, claiming that all such acts against foreign citizens should be stopped. However, he made no such orders in regards to robbery against the citizens of NDH.²⁴⁷

Faced with an all-out rebellion against the regime and discontent in all segments of society, including some *statist-oriented* officials and the army, Poglavnik had to react to calm the tensions which were endangering the regime itself. On 26 June 1941, Pavelić issued the *Extraordinary Law Decree and Command* in which he, quite alarmingly, declared

²⁴⁴ In Croatian Ustaška Nadzorna Služba. It was essentially a secret service agency dealing with various tasks, including the organization and running of concentration camps on the territory of NDH.

²⁴⁵ Dedijer. *The Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 219.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 220.

²⁴⁷ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 301, R.S. Prs. 1941 2339-15061, Ng. Jur. Br. 10119, Prs 7196.

that “all organs of public authority should watchfully look over the fact that they have to prevent any attempt of violence against property, or lives of any citizen or member of NDH or any foreign subject, even if that act is committed by an irresponsible element or a [government] official.”²⁴⁸ Moreover, Pavelić reacted to alarming rumors of mass murder and ethnic cleansing which were spreading among the population, and blamed it on the Jews, claiming that they were “spreading false news in purpose of alarming the populace,” and continues by saying that “they are considered collectively responsible, and will be treated accordingly, under the criminal law and placed in prison detentions under the open sky [referring to concentration camps].”²⁴⁹

The extraordinary legal decree is one of the first public proclamations in which Pavelić, and the Ustashe in general, recognized that there are rotten elements in the movement itself.²⁵⁰ This order had to be printed in all the newspapers for three days in a row, and moreover, was placarded in all the cities. With it, Pavelić wanted to make a public relations move, trying to provide an explanation for all the misdeeds by the Ustashe and blame it on *sour* elements which somehow penetrated the movement, but were actually saboteurs, and not the *real* Ustashe.

However, it seems that there came the time to completely change the initial vision of the ideal Ustashe. Personal initiative and aggressiveness which were an imperative during formation of NDH were not welcomed anymore. Poglavnik admitted that “while in the beginning, as I mentioned, everyone had their duty, and right to do the best they can in their own initiative to implement different state acts, this is, from the moment of the establishment of official administration, forbidden. [From now on no one should] do anything in

²⁴⁸ *Hrvatski narod*, “Izvanredna zakonska odredba i zapovijed,” No. 134, date: 28 June 1941, 1.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

their own initiative, and in their own will.²⁵¹ Moreover, it is everyone's duty to avoid any act, any action, which might carry even the slightest sign of arbitrariness, unlawfulness or even illegality."²⁵² Pavelić continued his apologetic elaboration by blaming everything on the revolutionary era which is now supposed to be done.²⁵³ Initial ruthless rhetoric towards the Serbs was now being softened up, and Pavelić explained that the Ustashe "are not going to avenge, and that is the truth,...[if they are going to avenge] that will only be done through the law. No one has the right to do this on their own hand, NO ONE [capitals in the original]."²⁵⁴ Pavelić's proclamation was directed against the Wild Ustashe, however he did not want to destroy them, but rather subject them to the more formal hierarchy of the Ustashe movement. Pavelić did not promise to stop the persecutions themselves, but to stop arbitrary murders, thus showing tendency to consider a state-oriented solution of the "Serbian Question."

To show that they were serious about their intention to subject the Wild Ustashe to the hierarchy and punish those responsible for arbitrariness, the first reports on how the Ustashe are purifying their ranks started to appear. In the same issue in which Pavelić made public his *Extraordinary Law Decree* there was an article titled *Fake Ustasha sentenced because of blackmail*. The press wrote about Bajro Mašić who visited some Jews and Serbs in Zagreb and told them they would not be deported if they give him a certain amount of money. Those who were blackmailed reported the case to the Ustashe authorities. Mašić was pronounced a "fake" Ustasha, although he wore an official Ustashe uniform and he was supposed to take the official Ustashe oath in two days. Apparently he was punished with two years of harsh prison and a financial fine.²⁵⁵ Bajro Mašić and those similar to him were

²⁵¹ *Hrvatski narod*, "Poglavnik učvršćuje temelje NDH," No. 137, date: 01 July 1941, 1.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Hrvatski narod*, "Dužnosti izvršitelja državne uprave," No. 137, 1 July 1941, 2.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, "Lažni ustaša osuđen radi ucjenjivanja," No. 158, date: 22 July 1941, 8.

being proclaimed *Nastashe*, who were now considered as the biggest enemies of NDH. Also there was an increasing level of apology to the public which was an attempt to save the positive image of the Ustashe movement, since their reputation was already infamous. Therefore, the press claimed that “everything unhealthy, embarrassing and painful, that appeared in our public life does not have anything to do with the Ustashe, those are the deeds of the *Nastashe*, people who do not belong among us, although they probably wear a huge letter ‘U’ on their foreheads, or on their chest. Every Croat has to be aware that these hard times are like a flood, in which everything impure is the first to come to the surface.”²⁵⁶ Whether Pavelić’s intention to dowse the activity of the Wild Ustashe was honest or not, they continued to operate freely and some of the harshest crimes committed by them were happening after July and August 1941, a full month after his declaration.

The Wild Ustashe rebellion against the state

Some Ustashe officials on the local level indeed tried to stop the activities of the Wild Ustashe, but faced severe resistance. For example, in report from 11 August, eleven Serbs from the town of Šid were killed “for no reason, and were thrown into the Danube;” all of them were prominent members in their local communities. The local Ustashe officials attempted to stop the group and disarm them but the Ustashe militia officer Illik who was the leader of the group which conducted the massacre came into a direct conflict with them, ignoring their orders.²⁵⁷ In the same period there were reports on how the Wild Ustashe killed the regular Ustashe, causing further discontent by the *statist-oriented* wing.²⁵⁸

The resistance towards the Wild Ustashe was further increasing, and as it did, the Wild Ustashe became further agitated, causing a conflict which might be illustrated as rebel-

²⁵⁶ *Hrvatski narod*, “Ustaše i oni drugi,” No. 160, date: 24 July 1941, 4.

²⁵⁷ Obhodaš, *Ustaška vojnica*, 80.

²⁵⁸ Croatian State Archive, Ministry of Internal Affairs (fond 223), box 301, R.S. Prs. 1941 2339-15061, Ng. jur. Br. 10086, R.S. Prs. 2339/41, document dated on 12 August 1941, 1.

lion against the state institutions, but not against the Ustashe movement itself. The Wild Ustashe groups were, of course, not alone, they had the support of high-ranking Ustashe who considered themselves paramilitarists, thinking that the Wild Ustashe are an essential tool in combating the Serb resistance and conducting ethnic cleansing.

The group which was by far best organized and showed the utmost resistance towards the appearance of the Wild Ustashe was the regular army and its generals. This group was led by Slavko Kvaternik, the highest military authority and a field-marshal. Kvaternik was a life-long soldier who served both in the Austro-Hungarian and the Yugoslav Army.²⁵⁹ Being prone to strict discipline and insistence on clear hierarchy, he was despising paramilitarism and the Wild Ustashe. On a number of occasions he entered into conflict with the leadership, trying to protect the generals who wanted to disarm the Wild Ustashe.

The best way to illustrate the power-struggle between the statist and paramilitarists is an event involving general Štancer,²⁶⁰ a commander-in-chief of the ground forces. In the night between 5 and 6 August 1941, there was a shooting heard in Zagreb, and a group of Ustashe kicked into Slavko Štancer's apartment, and under gun-point he was forced to lie down on the floor while the Ustashe were searching through his apartment.²⁶¹ Štancer was apparently another general trying to quell the Wild Ustashe groups, as he was infamous for his insistence on discipline and strict hierarchy in the military force. The conflict between those who tried to stop and those who further supported the Wild Ustashe was not only based on the local level, but was also revolving around the Ustashe elites.

²⁵⁹ Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 227.

²⁶⁰ Slavko Štancer (Stanzer) was a colonel in the Austro-Hungarian Army and after the proclamation of NDH he was appointed commander-in-chief of the regular army. Together with Slavko Kvaternik, Ivan Prpić, and other ex-Austro-Hungarian officers, he formed the base of the elite of the newly formed regular army which was in a state of constant tensions with the regime, and its paramilitary formations. Ibid, 389.

²⁶¹ Obhodaš, *Ustaška vojnica*, 81.

Generals and officers of the regular army were constantly warning their superiors and the government about the conflict with the Wild Ustashe and their massacres. For example when Mijo Babić, Poglavnik's protégé, was sent to Herzegovina in order to assemble volunteers for the Ustashe militia in June 1941, he apparently "assembled a couple hundred Wild Ustashe promising them different things [probably material gains], they attacked different villages around Čapljina and committed many different crimes."²⁶² General Prpić, who was in command of this area from the standpoint of the regular army, entered a conflict with these Wild Ustashe and lost his position because of the incident in August 1941. He called for the responsibility of the Wild Ustashe because of the crimes around Čapljina. Pavelić told him to let the issue go or he would "place him in front of the wall" meaning that he would be shot for treason. He was not shot, but barely survived an attempted assassination initiated from the highest Ustashe circles. The order for his assassination was issued by another protégé of Poglavnik, I. Herenčić.²⁶³ Pavelić bursted into rage when he talked about general Prpić. Apparently he was talked into believing that Prpić was complaining about the crimes of the Ustashe because his wife was Serbian.²⁶⁴

Kvaternik continued to insist on the fact that the army should be the only and the highest military authority in the country and not the paramilitarist Ustashe, and addressing the issue of the Wild Ustashe in a proclamation dated on 6 September he stated:

These [Wild Ustashe] are not the Ustashe, but savages and robbers, and therefore..., [generals] do not only have the right, but it is their duty, to reckon with whoever they are. The Ustashe officials are those who bear the largest part of the guilt because they did not fulfill Poglavnik's order. Your duty is to bring order, because savages and robbers [referring to the Wild Ustashe] are the same kind of people as are the

²⁶² Kisić-Kolanović. *Vojskovođa i politika*, 210-211.

²⁶³ Ibid, 45. Additional information can be found in Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 333.

²⁶⁴ Kisić-Kolanović. *Vojskovođa i politika*, 211.

Chetniks, and they deserve the same fate. That what is not organized in the Ustashe militia [wing], exists against the will of Poglavnik and therefore should carry the full responsibility, so that Poglavnik's will gets inside every village.²⁶⁵

Even after Kvaternik's and Pavelić's proclamations, some of the Wild Ustashe continued to defy the state institutions. Backed, at least in principle, by the high authorities, the local authorities did show intent to finally put the Wild Ustashe under their control. The conflict deepened further and some of the local Ustashe were facing death threats. When the governor of Pliva-Rama region wanted to subdue the Wild Ustashe around Jajce he *fell into their disgrace* and therefore he had to employ the army to protect him, and even had to move around different apartments "so that the [Wild] Ustashe could not get to him. Colonel of the army, Rupčić proclaimed that there is no government left in this region [Pliva-Rama], neither police, nor the Army hold it anymore, only these [Wild] Ustashe." Apparently the same group slaughtered 158 Greek-easterners in an Orthodox Church in Jajce on 16 September.²⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Wild Ustashe attacked another representative of the local government on 20 December. The Ustashe went to Donja Dubica into the office of the local Ustashe official; they wounded him and trashed his office. After this, a governor of the region ordered the disarmament of these Ustashe, but the commander of the army did nothing, probably out of fear of escalation of an all-out conflict between the army and the Wild Ustashe.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Obhodaš. *Ustaška vojnica*, 80-81.

²⁶⁶ Obhodaš, *Ustaška vojnica*, 82.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 82.

Chapter IV. Reshaping the policy of ethnic cleansing: Transition towards a completely state-organized ethnic cleansing

Quelling the Rebellion of the Wild Ustashe

The Wild Ustashe were found very useful during the first months of the establishment of NDH, they were providing operative assistance to the Ustashe militia, they participated in ethnic cleansing and mass murder which was in accordance with the aims established by the Ustashe ideology and, finally, they were a generous source of the new recruits into the Ustashe ranks. However by the end of the summer of 1941, the Wild Ustashe who did not completely *bend the knee* were becoming more of a burden than help to the regime. Mass murder conducted both by the Wild Ustashe and the regular Ustashe militia aroused alarm in the local population and caused an all-out rebellion of the Chetniks and Partisans on the territory of NDH, threatening the very existence of the regime. Moreover, the Italian and German occupational authorities were constantly appealing to Pavelić to stop the *wild violence* which was causing the rebellion.²⁶⁸ The Wild Ustashe did not only agitate the outergroups, but rather caused turmoil within the movement itself. The statist-oriented wing in the movement, led by the army and the Ustashe officials, was showing increasing discontent towards the paramilitary-oriented wing. Threatened with the complete disintegration of state institutions, breakup in the Ustashe ranks, and foreign pressure, Pavelić could not sponsor the Wild Ustashe any longer, and had to seriously implement the aims of his earlier public rhetoric.

It became clear to many in the Ustashe movement, most prominently to the leadership, that the idea that they can rule solely through violence did not have the effect they wished for, but led to devastating consequences. The image of the Ustashe elite depicted as

²⁶⁸ Glaise von Horstenau, *Zapisi iz NDH*, 147. See also Dulić, *Mass Killing in the Independent State of Croatia*, 260.

supermen who were above everything, including the state and the population, was shattered with an all-out rebellion. Therefore, a swift change in the policy was required, and the Ustashe announced in September that “the new age has come in the Ustashe movement,” under which it would heavily rely on the whole of the Croatian nation.²⁶⁹ The key words in the Ustashe propaganda became safety, security, stability and responsibility, instead of revolution, cleansing, autonomy and dynamism.

Poglavnik issued a dramatic order on 9 August, releasing virtually all mid-level and local-level Ustashe officials from their positions. All activities conducted on the local level were to be stopped, with an exception of activities of the Ustashe militia and army, because they were in the middle of the struggle against Partisan and Chetnik resistance. But all local forces not used to fighting the insurgents had to hold their position until new officials and governors were placed in the offices. Moreover, “all units which are organized as auxiliary help or the so-called ‘Wild Ustashe’ had to immediately stop with activities of any sort.”²⁷⁰

The Ustashe press became increasingly apologetic, self-critical, and demanding of purification in their ranks. In an effort to calm the agitated population, the Ustashe wanted to show themselves in the light of law and order, as propagators of the *holy ideal* which was poisoned by those unworthy of the membership in the movement. The apologists of the movement proclaimed that “in the first months of our freedom and rebuilding of statehood there was a pile of questions, as a relic of painful period of our history, therefore it is not unnatural that in the flood, which the Croatian Ustashe movement turned into, as a consequence of becoming a mass-national movement, some people surfaced who are not worthy of wearing the Ustashe uniform. There appeared a certain number of Nastashe and Wild

²⁶⁹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Novo razdoblje u Hrvatskom Ustaškom pokretu,” no. 220, 22 September 1941, 1.

²⁷⁰ *Hrvatski narod*, “Odredba o razriješenju dužnosti,” no. 177, 10 August 1941, 1.

Ustashe who, in this great period, used their freedom to destroy the reputation of the moral power of the movement itself.”²⁷¹

The quelling of the Wild Ustashe meant that the Ustashe had to invent a new image of the ideal Ustashe which had to be radically different from the one propagated at the moment they ascended to power. The new image is best illustrated in a speech given to the newly appointed Ustashe officials in September 1941, in which Pavelić stated that

Ten Ustashe who are used to discipline, who are ideologically built, are worth more than thousands of unorganized, ideologically unbuilt and uneducated people from the crowd. Your duty is to immediately, as you take your offices, disable the so-called Wild Ustashe, people who always served everyone, and who crowded the Ustashe lines, who put on the Ustashe uniforms, so that they could bring shame to the Ustashe movement and the Croatian people, and damage the reputation of the Croatian state.²⁷²

To further show that he is serious about the order, more and more Wild Ustashe, who did not have the protection of the higher circles were shot, and news about it were reported in the press. For example on 19 August, four Wild Ustashe were shot in Sarajevo. Apparently they self-willingly took some Chetniks from detention, and maltreated them, before the judgment by the Ustashe court was announced and the full investigation was over. On 18 August, the Ustashe court sentenced them to death and on 19 August they were executed. Jure Francetić²⁷³ announced on several occasions that the Wild “Ustashe are not

²⁷¹ *Hrvatski narod*, “Novo razdoblje u Hrvatskom Ustaškom pokretu,” no. 220, 22 September 1941, 1.

²⁷² *Hrvatski narod*, “Dužnost vam je propovjedati istinu i progoniti laž i klevetu,” no. 219, 21 September 1941, 1.

²⁷³ Jure Francetić (1912-1942), joined the Ustashe in 1934 and became the main responsible person for seizing power in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In September 1941 he became the commander of the Black legion, elite

any kind of executive authority, and every new action of such kind, carried out by the self-proclaimed Ustashe, is to be immediately reported to the nearest police station.”²⁷⁴ Faced with more and more accused Wild Ustashe, on 20 August 1941, the authorities established a special disciplinary court in Zagreb which was specialized in the crimes committed by the Ustashe themselves.²⁷⁵ The mobile court in Zagreb sentenced another Wild Ustasha to death on 3 September 1941. Eugen Gutić was an ex-Catholic priest who robbed a train and afterwards arrived to the local village of Bališevo. There he robbed local stores, and also broke into the apartment of a Serbian-Orthodox priest, robbed him, and shot him on the spot, while he was representing himself as a Ustashe official.²⁷⁶ On 22 September 1941, there came a new announcement under which another two wild Ustashe are going to be shot because they *were killing and robing Greek-easterners*.²⁷⁷

The transition period: From Wild to State organized ethnic cleansing

The campaign of the Wild Ustashe and the Ustashe militia, who were the key agents in conducting the wild ethnic cleansing, resulted in more than 100,000 murdered Serbs in the countryside. These numbers only cover the period of summer months.²⁷⁸ According to a different source, a letter smuggled from the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch to the west, the total number of the Ustashe-killed Serbs could be up to 180,000 between April and August of 1941.²⁷⁹ The direct result of such ruthless policy was the Chetnik and Partisan resistance which appeared in July of 1941; the rebellion of these two groups, however, was only one of the results.

Ustashe unit which committed many atrocities and specialized in anti-guerilla actions. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 117-8.

²⁷⁴ *Hrvatski narod*, “Strijeljanje četiri samozvana Ustaše u Sarajevu,” no. 189, 22 August 1941, 12.

²⁷⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, “Ustaški stegovni i kazneni sud,” no. 190, 23 August 1941, 4.

²⁷⁶ *Hrvatski narod*, “Osuđen i strijeljan Eugen Gutić,” no. 204, 6 September 1941, 2.

²⁷⁷ *Hrvatski narod*, “Strijeljanje intelektualnih začetnika zlocina u zgradi Ravnateljstva pošte,” no. 221, 23 September 1941.

²⁷⁸ Korb, *Understanding Ustaša Violence*, 5.

²⁷⁹ Irvine, *The Croatian Question*, 91.

Immediately after the Ustashe took power, they enjoyed some support among the population, especially of those leaning towards nationalism, and the rightist elements in the Croatian Peasant Party. However, because of the rule of lawlessness, arbitrariness of mass murder and ethnic cleansing, the support for the regime fell dramatically. According to the commander of the German Army in NDH, Rudolf Lütters , only 2% of the population in Croatia continued to support the regime after only a couple of weeks of them being in power.²⁸⁰

Moreover, the German military started to increasingly criticize the Ustashe regime because of the arbitrariness of violence. German military officials showed no major complaints regarding the policies against the Jews or Roma, because they were more or less controlled and organized. However, Glaise von Horstenau openly blamed the Ustashe for destabilization of the country because of giving blessing towards uncontrolled violence and plunder conducted over the Serbs.²⁸¹ The Ustashe mass violence was one of the key reasons for the rebellion of the Chetniks and Partisans during July of 1941. This fact harmed the German military interest because it endangered the vital transportation lines which went through Croatia. Furthermore, because the Ustashe could not quell the rebellion on their own, the Germans had to deploy additional military units in order to keep the situation under control. In addition, the German military noted that the Ustashe were digging their own graves in terms of undermining the state institutions, and one of the German officers noted that “on the entire state territory there appears (...) a condition of state powerlessness.”²⁸² Since NDH was one of the most loyal allies of the Third Reich, it was in their interest that the state had strong institutions and a stable government.

²⁸⁰ Philip J. Cohen, *Serbia's Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 93, 195. See also Adeli, *From Jasenovac to Yugoslavism*, 71.

²⁸¹ Gumz, *Wehrmacht Perception of Mass Violence in Croatia*, 1032.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 1034-5.

The acts of wild ethnic cleansing also raised serious discontent among those Ustashe who were more leaning towards the state-organized solutions to the Serbian *question*. For example, the Ustasha colonel Petar Blašković, who attended a meeting with the German Wehrmacht officials in Sarajevo on 20 June 1941, argued that the Ustashe had to change their approach towards violence against the Serbs, because it provoked an open Serbian rebellion. He said that the Ustashe are “working too openly, and attract resentment from the population and vigilance from foreigners, who speak unfavorably about the [Ustashe] organization and think it is not equal to the situation.”²⁸³

Facing with such pressures, even Pavelić himself understood that the Wild Ustashe had to be constrained after they entered numerous conflicts with the Ustashe representatives and officials on the field. It seems like he abandoned the idea of solving the Serbian *question* through wild ethnic cleansing and leaned more towards the state-organized solutions during the summer of 1941. In a speech given to the regional governors and the Ustashe officials on 30 June 1941, Pavelić proclaimed that there had to be a “system” with regards to the resolution of the “Serbian question”.²⁸⁴

Having experience with state-organized genocide, which was already well under way against the Jews, the Ustashe leadership started seriously considering the solution of the Serbian *question* through similar means. This meant that the arbitrariness of mass violence on the total territory of Croatia was not any more sustainable, but had to be geographically contained. Serbs could not be killed in their villages and households anymore, but they had to be transferred to camps as special designated areas in which arbitrary murder would be allowed. Therefore, the Ustashe compromise regarding mass murder was not to eliminate it, but to relocate it. By transferring violence to the camps they would be able to

²⁸³ As quoted in a report given by Petar Blašković in Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 18-9.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 19.

reduce the transparency of the campaign of murder, and could be more efficient instead of giving them time to organize resistance, as was previously the case when rumors started spreading that the Ustashe were coming to their village.

It seems like this change regarding mass violence, and transition to a more state-organized method was also favorable for the Germans. They did not object to the Ustashe violence in itself, but despised the fact that wild ethnic cleansing was conducted based on momentarily passions and emotions, instead of any real rationale.²⁸⁵ Moreover, the Germans helped the Ustashe create an efficient camp system by providing them with expertise from the SS. Such transfer of knowledge on how to organize camp systems would prove to have a major impact on the Ustashe in terms of increasing leaning towards the state-organized solutions.

Establishing the camp system

The first phase in organizing the Ustashe camp systems started as soon as NDH was formed in April 1941. The existing prison system could not absorb the immense amount of people identified as *undesirable* by the regime. Consequently, the Ustashe had to increase the capacities and organize improvised concentration and detention sites. Improvised detention sites were mostly located on the existing infrastructure of abandoned factories, hangars or warehouses.²⁸⁶ One of such smaller camps was the famous Kerestinec castle which was taken by the Ustashe on 19 April 1941. Kerestinec is well known because many prominent Croatian communists were held there and attempted failed breakthroughs.²⁸⁷

The first larger newly established concentration camp in NDH was called Danica. It took its first prisoners, 504 of them, mostly Serbs, on 28 April. The camp itself was situated

²⁸⁵ Gumz, *Whrmacht Perception of Mass Violence in Croatia*, 1034.

²⁸⁶ Kevo, *Počeci logora Jasenovac*, 472-3. See also Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 267.

²⁸⁷ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 269.

in an ex-chemical factory which provided an efficient infrastructure such as the railway network and housing objects.²⁸⁸ By mid-July, about 5000 people went through it, according to the camps treasurer, 3000 of them were Serbs, circa 1000 Croats, about 600 Jews and 400 Roma.²⁸⁹

The camps created in the first phase were often created *ad hoc* arrangements, according to situational and regional needs. However, major changes took place during the second phase in creating camp systems in NDH. These changes were induced by transfer of knowledge and expertise from the Nazi Germany, and were also marked by the greater ambitiousness of the Ustashe. Local and small camps which were dominating the first phase were now to be replaced with larger complexes and death camps.

The transfer of knowledge between the Ustashe and the SS was made possible through personal contacts of Eugen Dido Kvaternik and Willy Beissner, a member of the SS and a German police emissary in NDH. Kvaternik, a young and ambitious man, holding immense power in the security and police forces of the Ustashe wished to improve concentration camps in Croatia because they lacked capacities and, primarily, organization which was needed to cope with the increasing amount of prisoners. Kvaternik went to Berlin to meet with the emissaries of the SS and he even met with Heinrich Himmler. An exchange program was arranged between the SS and the Ustashe according to which 100 members of the Ustashe were to be sent to different SS offices in order to enhance their expertise. The meeting itself obviously had a major impact on Kvaternik, because as soon as he came back to Croatia, on 2 June, he started working on administrative preconditions for organizing

²⁸⁸ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 267.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

larger camp systems in Croatia. Only two days after he came back from the SS headquarters, he delegated Mijo Babić to start organizing all the concentration camps in NDH.²⁹⁰

The product of the expertise transfer between the SS and the Ustashe was an ambitious project of creating a camp which would be able to absorb a large number of victims on a national, not a regional level. With this goal in mind, the Ustashe created the Gospić-Pag-Jadovno camp system on 18 June 1941. Gospić was the administrative and transit center because it had a developed transportation infrastructure. The idea was to send prisoners to Gospić which was well connected with the rest of the country, and then to transfer the prisoners either to a camp on the island of Pag, or to the Jadovno camp which was located in a forest underneath the mountain of Velebit. Initially, these camps were supposed to be organized as labor camps, however very soon they turned out to have characteristics of a death camp system. There is no preserved information on how many people exactly went through the camp system of Gospić-Pag-Jadovno. Stjepan Rubinić, one of the administrators responsible for transferring the prisoners from Gospić to other camps stated that about 28,700 people got into the camp system. The overwhelming majority of prisoners were Serbs, about 3,000 were Jews, and 1,000 were Croats who were considered communists.²⁹¹ According to testimonies of different survivors the treatment towards the Serbs was by far the worst in comparison to the Jews and communists.²⁹² The mass liquidations of prisoners were done during the night in order to make room for new prisoners because the capacities of the camp were still underdeveloped.²⁹³

However swift and unpredicted changes took place in the international arena which would put the system of Gospić-Pag-Jadovno out of function. The Ustashe terror induced a

²⁹⁰ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća*, 118. See also Bartulin, *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 290-291. Also Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 266-7.

²⁹¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 279-80.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 284.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 286.

widespread rebellion in July of 1941, which threatened the military interest of both Italy and Germany. In addition, Italy never dropped the idea of dominating NDH and wanted to occupy at least a part of it, in addition to the territories it initially gained through an official agreement with the Ustashe. Therefore, on 16 August, Mussolini officially requested to occupy the whole southern part of the country relying on an argument that the Ustashe do not have the power to quell the rebellion of Chetniks and Partisans.²⁹⁴ The Ustashe could not oppose the Italian requests because under the agreement signed between Italy and NDH, Italy could occupy the southern part of the country in case there were circumstances which would endanger the safety of the Italian military or its coastal territories.²⁹⁵ The camp system of Gospić-Pag-Jadovno, was located in the territory which the Italians wanted to occupy, in the so-called zone B. The Ustashe therefore had to liquidate the camp before the Italians came. Because of the lack of transportation and logistics, a part of the prisoners was killed, and the rest were transported to the north of the country.²⁹⁶ The Gospić-Pag-Jadovno complex of camps completely ceased to function on 23 August.²⁹⁷ In total, about 24,000²⁹⁸ people died in the Gospić-Pag-Jadovno camp system, among them about 2,500 Jews.²⁹⁹

With the closing of this camp system, the Ustashe lost the only large camp which was used as a central national camp of NDH. They were only left with regional camps which had small capacities, causing the need to create a new, larger camp system. However, even the Gospić-Pag-Jadovno system was essentially highly impractical because it was relatively distant from the center of the country. Moreover, although Gospić as a transition center was well connected, the transport of prisoners to the island had to be done by ships, and

²⁹⁴ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 290.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 291.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 292-3.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 280.

²⁹⁸ Communist authorities estimated that the number of people killed only in Jadovno could be as high as 72,000. In Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 724.

²⁹⁹ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 301.

Jadovno was cut off because it was located in a forest. Therefore, the Ustashe did not only want a replica of the old camp, but they wished for a more effective camp system which would be better connected instead of stretching over many localities.

In order to create a more efficient system of concentration camps, the Ustashe created the Ustashe Secret Service on 25 August 1941.³⁰⁰ The head of the third department, which was responsible for administering all concentration camps in Croatia, was Vjekoslav Maks Luburić.³⁰¹ After Luburić took over the organization of all the camp systems, further exchange of expertise between the SS and the Ustashe took place. Luburić went to Oranienburg, the administrative center of all German concentration camps, and the seat of the SS death-squad *Totenkopfverbände* units. Luburić spent ten days observing the practices of the SS and the organizational structure of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp during September of 1941.³⁰² Sigfried Kasche, an influential German emissary in Croatia, also claimed that the knowledge acquired in Germany deeply influenced Luburić and his conception of how the existing and new camps in Croatia should be restructured and improved.³⁰³

After Luburić came back from Germany he wanted to employ his newly acquired knowledge in creating a new central camp on the territory of NDH. Luburić was deeply involved in building the new camp Jasenovac which did not only tend to replace the already shut-down Gospić-Pag-Jadovno camp system, but drastically exceed it in efficiency, size and capacity. The process of establishment of the Jasenovac camp system began on 12 Au-

³⁰⁰ Hrvatski Državni Arhiv, ARHiNET, Ustaška Nadzorna Služba. http://arhinet.arhiv.hr/details.aspx?ItemId=3_4117, last accessed on 5 June 2015.

³⁰¹ Vjekoslav Maks Luburić (1914-1969) was a member of the Ustashe movement from 1931. He founded the camp Jasenovac and became one of the symbols of the Ustashe ruthlessness. Later on, he became the commander of the Ustashe voluntary units in Herzegovina. He entered a conflict with the German military representatives who wanted his arrest because he was allegedly interfering with their interests. Pavelić declined his arrest and hid him in a village under a false name. During 1944 he came back into service and participated in persecution of the Ustashe associated with the Lorković-Vokić putsch in September of that same year. By the end of the war Pavelić named him the commander of all the forces of NDH. Luburić managed to escape the infamous surrender of NDH forces in Austria and lived the rest of his life in Spain. Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 242. See also Matković, *Povijest NDH*, 109.

³⁰² Bartulin, *The Ideology of Nation and Race*, 382-3. See also Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 241.

³⁰³ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 312.

gust 1941, and the first prisoners arrived to the camp eleven days later, on 23 August.³⁰⁴ Those prisoners were mostly the ones who survived the transport and evacuation from the previous Gospić-Pag-Jadovno complex. However, this was not the only string of continuity between the two camp systems. The majority of the guards from Pag and Jadovno were transferred to Jasenovac, and made the core of the new system, applying the experiences from the previous camp to the new one.³⁰⁵

Jasenovac's geographical position was well thought through, and all the camps of its system were concentrated in one area. Jasenovac consisted of five larger camps with various kinds of sub camps. The main camp called Brickyard³⁰⁶ was located between three rivers on a swampy terrain. It was hardly accessible to the population and also represented an ideal defensive position against potential attacks from the Chetniks and Partisans. Jasenovac was built on an existing industrial infrastructure and therefore had developed railways which were going directly into the camp.³⁰⁷

Jasenovac was initially imagined as a forced labor camp, and the first deaths in the camp were closely tied to its initial function. Prisoners worked for twelve hours a day, except on Sundays. This working quota was maintained with extremely scarce intake of food. Prisoners received one kilo of bread a day which was split among twelve people; for another meal they received a soup made either of potatoes or beans.³⁰⁸ Combining such food rations and amount of work, many prisoners worked to death. Another contributor to this *non-invasive* way of murder were diseases which spread through the camp and were caused by very bad hygiene in the camp itself. The death from *non-invasive* methods of murder reached their peak during winter of 1941/1942, when on average about twenty prisoners a

³⁰⁴ Kevo, *Počeci logora Jasenovac*, 474-5.

³⁰⁵ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 307.

³⁰⁶ In Croatian Ciglana.

³⁰⁷ Kevo, *Počeci logora Jasenovac*, 477.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 487.

day died from exhaustion and hunger.³⁰⁹ By 12 December 1941 the main camp had eight operating barracks and 38 more were planned, but not all of them were ever built.³¹⁰ The camp never had more than 5,000 prisoners, which was due to the fact that there were constant rotations. Whenever a new group of prisoners was arriving, room for them was made by mass murder of the existing ones. It seems that this process lasted throughout the camp's existence.³¹¹

In the beginning, Jews constituted the majority of the prisoners in the camp, and by the end of 1941, there were already 4,000 Jews in Jasenovac.³¹² However, with the shift of the Ustashe policy towards mass violence, a change in the social composition of the camps followed. As noted earlier, the wild ethnic cleansing towards Serbs was highly *counterproductive* and there was an increasing pressure from inside and outside of the Ustashe movement to reduce the wild violence and replace it with a more organized *system*. With the establishment of Jasenovac the Ustashe got the infrastructure they needed in order to include a bigger number of Serbs into the state-organized mass murder.

Indeed, during the end of 1941 and consequently in 1942, an increasing number of Serbs was arrested and deported to camps. The archive of the Ustashe Secret Service was flooded with reports on how the Serbs were arrested and under which circumstances they were sent to the camps. There was an increase in numbers of such reports at the beginning of 1942. There was a phrase which was written on the file of every arrestee, stating that “there is a suspicion that the individual had communicated with the rebels, and is as a Greek-easterner sent to the concentration camp for compulsory detention.”³¹³ Moreover,

³⁰⁹ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 309.

³¹⁰ Kevo, *Počeci logora Jasenovac*, 479.

³¹¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 315.

³¹² Kevo, *Počeci logora Jasenovac*, 489.

³¹³ Hrvatski Državni Arhiv, Ustaška Nadzorna Služba (fond 248/1-3-1), box 1, Ured I. Ravnateljstvo Ustaških Redarstava Nezavisne Države Hrvatske u Zagrebu, br. U.Z. 10293/42-4, Predmet: Napijalo Mile, upućen u logor.

there were various decrees and orders which were disguised as anti-partisan measures, but were actually in service of the state-organized ethnic cleansing. For example, an order from 31 March 1942, stated that “if there is an attack on the army or the Ustashe units, railways or state institutions near village[s] should be searched, and from all the houses where no men can be found, everyone from the household [women and children] should be taken hostage to the concentration camps. Houses, treasure [cattle], grain and other belongings will become state property.”³¹⁴ Consequently, by the end of 1941 and beginning of 1942, the number of Serbs started to greatly exceed that of Jews.³¹⁵

With constant influx of prisoners sent to Jasenovac, the camp system was radicalized and simultaneously to being a labor camp it also became a death camp. The rate of murders exploded during 1942. For example, out of those 4,000 Jews who arrived to the camp by the end of 1941, barely 10% lived to the spring of 1942.³¹⁶ On a meeting with Galeazzo Ciano in Venice held in December of 1941, Pavelić proudly announced that out of the initial population of 35,000 Jews *there are no more than 12,000 [Jews] left* on the territory of NDH.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ As quoted in Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 323.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 316.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 317.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 405.

Victims of Jasenovac by sex, age and nationality³¹⁸

Nationality	Children	Males	Females	Total
Serbs	12,683	21,738	13,206	47,627
Roma	5,608	5,688	4,877	16,173
Jews	1,601	7,762	3,753	13,116
Croats	140	2,866	1,249	4,255
Others				1,974
Total	20,101	39,570	23,474	83,145

Number of deaths among victims per year and nationality³¹⁹

Nationality	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	Unknown	Total
Serbs	4,748	34,092	2,345	4,700	1322	410	47,627
Roma	2,261	12,838	310	691	57	16	16,173
Jews	3,142	8004	655	490	405	420	13,116
Croats	221	929	378	1,071	1530	126	4,255
Others							1,974
Total	10,462	56,369	3,893	7,510	3,881	1,030	83,145

Jasenovac was a camp system with infamously ruthless methods of extermination of prisoners. Violence in the camp was radicalized with the change of social structure and enormous increase of prisoners as a consequence of the increasing state-organized method in conducting the ethnic cleansing. It seems that the influx of new guards in the camp who

³¹⁸ Jasenovac Memorial Site, “List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac Concentration Camp.” <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6711>, last accessed on 8 June 2015.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

were connected to the Wild Ustashe also influenced the radicalization of violence in the camp.³²⁰ Previous methods of extermination in the camps were usually conducted by bullets, but the new favorite methods of extermination were primitive tools such as axes, hammers, knives, and daggers. Moreover, these tools were not only used to cause quick deaths, but torture and mutilation of victims were commonly practiced.³²¹ For example, Imre Rochlitz, one of the survivors from Jasenovac testified that a prisoner was skinned alive in front of the whole barracks as a punishment for attempting to escape.³²²

Jasenovac death camp which functioned from the late August of 1941 to 22 April 1945, was the central national camp on the area of NDH. That was also the biggest camp system in Europe during the Second World War in which the mass murder was conducted without the participation of the SS.³²³

³²⁰ Miroslav Filipović is an example of an ex-Wild Ustashe who arrived to the camp and was involved in thousands of deaths in the most ruthless ways. Dizdar et al, *Tko je tko u NDH*, 114.

³²¹ Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz*, 231-236.

³²² Imre Rochlitz, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive. URL, last accessed 7 June 2015.

³²³ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 304.

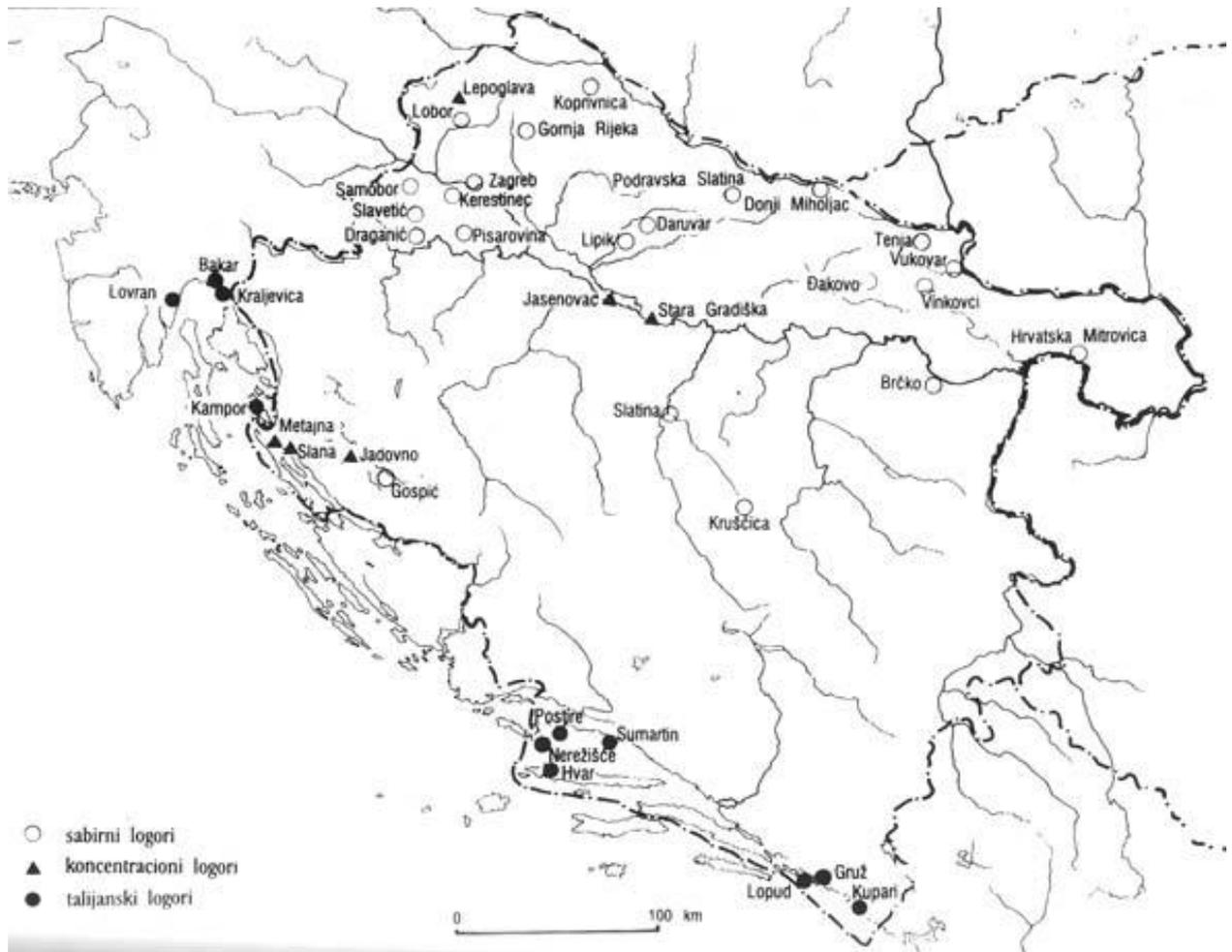


Image 1 Camp system's in NDH³²⁴

³²⁴ Image taken from Jasenovac Memorial Site, "Camps in the Independent State of Croatia 1941-1945." <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=5321>, last accessed on 8 June 2015.

The aftermath (1942-1945)

The Ustashe movement continued to shift between different policies regarding state structure and organization, as well as the *undesired* ethnic minorities throughout the existence of NDH (1941-1945). However, after 1941 the overall attitude leaned towards reducing the activities and arbitrariness of the Wild Ustashe. Although throughout the wartime period in Croatia they did not cease to exist, the major trends changed, and numbers of the Wild Ustashe and their activities were in decrease.³²⁵ The new trend, starting with the beginning of 1942 was to rely increasingly on the state institutions and their agents in solving the “Serbian question.” State-organized policies, employed towards the Jews and Roma from the moment the Ustashe took power, proved to be far more effective and less chaotic than the practices aimed towards the Serbs throughout the first months of the Ustashe rule.

The Ustashe change of attitude towards wild ethnic cleansing can be observed in one of the biggest anti-Partisan military operations conducted on the territory of NDH, the battle of Kozara during July of 1942. The operation itself was a combined effort of the Ustashe and *Wehrmacht* to *pacify* the area where they managed to surround the rebellious Partisan forces. However, the aim of the operation greatly exceeded the military objectives, and the intention was to ethnically cleanse the whole territory under pretense that the civilian population was helping Partisans. Instead of committing mass murder of all the Serbian populace in their homes or nearby forests, as was the dominant practice throughout 1941, the Ustashe decided to heavily rely on state-organized measures. They captured 68,000 villagers, deported part of them to Germany for forced labor, while the rest were transferred to the existing camp systems, particularly Jasenovac, in which around 15,000 prisoners were killed

³²⁵ Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 206.

upon arrival.³²⁶ More than 10,000 children, whose parents were either killed or deported to Germany were also placed inside the camp system. The first intention was to assimilate them, but the Ustashe abandoned this idea, and most of the children were either starved to death or killed in camps.³²⁷ Undertakings of such size could not have been possible during the spring or summer of 1941, when the Ustashe did not possess such a developed camp infrastructure, nor did they have the organizational preconditions for state-organized operations of such extent. Efficient camp systems, like Jasenovac, only started to develop in autumn of 1941, therefore state-organized mass murder in the period of 1941 could only have been possible on a smaller scale. A historian Jonathan Gumz claims that the Ustashe started extensively combining planned military operations with focused geographical ethnic cleansing under the influence of the Germans.³²⁸

An integral part of the state-organized ethnic cleansing was the pseudo-legality on which the Ustashe extensively relied in order to persecute their victims. The Serbs were sent to concentration camps under pretense of collaboration with Partisans or Chetniks, and the accusation itself was often good enough evidence to the Ustashe in order to send a person to the camp.³²⁹ Although massacres of the Serbs in order to create an ethnically cleansed territory of NDH constantly occurred during the war-time period, it seems that the shift from the wild to state-organized ethnic cleansing slowed down the rate of murder. The number of Serbian victims was much lower during the second half of the Ustashe rule, between 1943 and 1945, compared to the period of 1941 to 1942.³³⁰ However, the lower number of Serbian victims is not only due to the shift in the Ustashe policy, but also other circumstances

³²⁶ Korb, *Nation Building and Mass Violence*, 300. See also Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 323.

³²⁷ Adeli, *From Jasenovac to Yugoslavism*, 56. See also Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 324.

³²⁸ Gumz, *Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia*, 1021-2.

³²⁹ Hrvatski Državni Arhiv, Ustaška nadzorna služba (fond 248/1-3-1), box 1, Ured I. Ravnateljstvo Ustaških Redarstava Nezavisne Države Hrvatske u Zagrebu, br. U.Z. 10293/42-4, Predmet: Napijalo Mile, upućen u logor.

³³⁰ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 722.

such as greater adaptability of the Serbs through hiding or joining the resistance. It should also be taken into account that the Ustashe started losing control over larger parts of the territory of NDH in the second half of the war and therefore they could not proceed with persecution or ethnic cleansing in these areas.

The conflict between different factions in the Ustashe movement reached height towards the end of the war in September 1944. The situation regarding war efforts on the national and international level was becoming desperate, and some of the moderate Ustashe led by Mladen Lorković, the Minister of Interior, and Ante Vokić, the Minister of Armed forces, attempted negotiations with the Allies. Hard-liner Ustashe seized this opportunity to confront those who, in their opinion, were not radical enough, and arrests and assassinations in the movement peaked again. Lorković and Vokić were arrested under accusations of high-treason, although there are indications that Pavelić knew about their attempts to change allegiance and discussed it with them. The events revolving Vokić and Lorković resemble those which followed after the famous attempted assassination of Hitler in July 1944. The alleged *coup* was used to get rid of any potential political rivals within the Ustashe movement. Prominent student leaders and intellectuals in the movement were arrested, and many of them killed. Historian Rory Yeomans claims that through this neutralization of the more moderate elements in the Ustashe movement, the hard-liners attempted to further radicalize their bloody campaign. Yeomans interpreted this as the return to the initial “revolution by blood,” under which the bloody campaign of wild ethnic cleansing started during 1941.³³¹ However, by the end of 1944, the Ustashe did not control the majority of the territory of NDH, and the change in policy did not influence the outcome of ethnic cleansing, nor did it reach the extent of the wild ethnic cleansing committed during the summer of 1941.

³³¹ Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 346.

The Ustashe regime intertwined its fate with the Axis powers, and Pavelić remained Hitler's most loyal ally. When the war was near its end, the Ustashe followed the German practice of withdrawing to the west. The Ustashe feared reprisals from the Partisans because of the collaboration with the Axis and because of their ruthless rule, mass murder and persecution of political and ethnic groups. Therefore, the retreating Germans were joined by the Ustashe because they wanted to reach Austria, where the British forces were situated, hoping that they would be treated in accordance to the international law.³³² Some among the Ustashe even hoped that the remaining forces of NDH could be preserved by the Western allies as a "nucleus of armed forces for the struggle against aggressive international communism."³³³ Members of the Ustashe government fled the country on 4 May, and Pavelić himself fled to Italy on 6 May, abandoning his ministers and the retreating army.³³⁴ Armed forces of NDH, numbering around 116,000 soldiers surrendered to the combined British and Partisan forces in Bleiburg, near the Austro-Slovenian border, on 15 May 1945.³³⁵

The estimated numbers of victims of the Ustashe rule vary greatly, and were subjected to manipulation for political and international reasons. The communist authorities estimated that only in Jasenovac, by 1943, the death toll was 600,000 people. Some Serbian authors, just before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, when the national feelings were running high, estimated that the number of Serbs killed in Jasenovac is as high as 1,000,000 victims. Egon Berger, a Jewish prisoner who survived 44 months in Jasenovac death camp, claimed that around 200,000 people were killed there.³³⁶ However, one of the most detailed accounts on how many people were killed, regarding years, gender, age and nationality in Jasenovac was published by the official Jasenovac Memorial Site. Through the list of individual vic-

³³² Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 754.

³³³ *Ibid*, 762.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 753.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 760-1.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, 727.

tims, the Jasenovac Memorial Site registered 83,145 victims who died in the camp.³³⁷ Franjo Tuđman, a historian and the first president of the Republic of Croatia, estimated that the total death toll in concentration camps of NDH could be somewhere between 180,000 and 240,000.³³⁸

Mark Biondich combines the data from the secondary literature and demographic studies, and sets the number of Serbs killed in NDH at 350,000, accounting for 19% of the total Serbian population. The data on the Roma losses are particularly scarce, but they have been estimated to as high as 27,000 deaths which accounts for the loss of 96% of the total Roma population living on the territory of NDH at the time of its creation.³³⁹ Out of approximately 38,000, or 39,000 Jews who lived on the territory of NDH upon its creation, only 9,000 survived the war.³⁴⁰ Therefore, approximately only 23% of the Jewish community survived the war.

³³⁷ Jasenovac Memorial Site, "List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac concentration camp." <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6711>, last accessed on 3 June, 2015.

³³⁸ Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 728.

³³⁹ Biondich, *Religion and Nation*, 72. See also Adeli, *From Jasenovac to Yugoslavism*, 56-57.

³⁴⁰ Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust*, 636.

Conclusion

The preconditions for ethnic cleansing committed by the Ustashe developed during the movement's pre-war evolution between 1930 and 1941. The Ustashe came into existence as a paramilitary group which had the ideal of *resurrecting* NDH through destruction of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia with terrorist means. Isolated in emigration, and concentrated on the territory of Italy, which provided them sponsorship, they started increasingly interpreting politics through combination of two ideals, *blood* and *violence*. They created an ethnocentric view in which determining who was a Croat depended on the *quality* of blood and all who do not qualify as such should have been excluded from the Croatian political life. Their view on the nation was organic, emphasizing that it had to be cleansed of infectious elements, or otherwise it would rot.

In the second half of the 1930s, in addition to the already established organic nationalist program, the Ustashe engaged in a process of ideology transfer from other fascist movements. They embraced racist views, antisemitism, anti-communism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-liberalism and the *new order* politics partially from Fascism, but primarily from Nazism. Fascization and radicalization of the Ustashe movement further sharpened their manicheistic view on the struggle to life and death, between absolute good and evil and different ethnic groups residing on the Croatian soil. Success of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy and their reliance on radicalism and violence further encouraged the Ustashe to build their political platform on these bases.

The Ustashe came to power in NDH in April 1941, as a byproduct of the Axis invasion on Yugoslavia and its consequent disbandment. The Ustashe immediately initiated a campaign of far-reaching reorganizational project in accordance with their ideological goals. One of the most important and thorough undertakings in reshaping the society was the process of ethnic cleansing. The Ustashe were convinced that most of the social and

political problems in the country could be solved by eliminating the *undesirable* ethnic groups which included the Serbs, Jews and Roma.

The policies towards the Jews were seen as an attempt to deeply reorganize the economic model of the state, abandoning liberal capitalism and focusing on nationalization of the industrial enterprises. The solution of the “Roma question“ had deeply symbolical connotations of getting rid of socially unacceptable norms of behavior such as nomadism, begging and unproductiveness. The “Serbian question” proved to be the most important one. By elimination of the Serbs, the Ustashe believed that they would secure stability and political and ethnic independence.

The Jews and Roma were identified in racial terms through legal framework of the state which attempted to have a universal approach to these ethnic minorities. Further state-organized measures followed, aimed at these minorities, and little improvisation was applied to these groups, since their definition was total and precise from the standpoint of the legislation. The Serbs, quite the opposite, were not identified in racial terms but in vague political-ethnic terms. Although, there existed a consensus among the Ustashe elite that the Serbs had to disappear from the territory of NDH, there was no agreement on how to accomplish that aim.

A variety of methods exercised over the Serbs, ranging from deportations, assimilation to mass murder, was the result of many different factors. One of the most dominant ones was the fact that the Serbs numbered approximately 1,85 million residents of NDH which made any policy difficult because of the enormity of organizational and infrastructural undertakings which would have to be applied.³⁴¹ Moreover, the Serbs stretched over 60-70% of the territory of NDH which further complicated the matter as compared to the Jews

³⁴¹ See footnote 29.

for example, which were mostly concentrated in the urban areas.³⁴² However, ideological under-development of the Ustashe proved to be another grave issue regarding how the Serbs should be treated because some members of the movement considered them to be a racial entity which had to disappear physically, as opposed to those who thought that, at least a part of them could be assimilated.

Vagueness of policies towards the Serbs did not stop the Ustashe to undertake an enormous anti-Serbian campaign. They combined this propaganda with the image of a new, ideal Croatian man. Like other fascist movements, the Ustashe attempted to distort the notion of existing morals and norms of human behavior. Hatred, primarily towards the Serbs, but also against the Jews and Roma, expressed by the sources of state and party authority was not only a blunt propaganda, but a new norm of behavior and communication. Expression of hatred towards these ethnic groups was, according to the Ustashe, a way of expressing loyalty to the Croatian nation, and an act of patriotism.

Seriously understaffed and lacking mass support in the first months of them being in power, the Ustashe wanted to increasingly employ *ordinary* population regarding their aims. They encouraged the creation of auxiliary units and armed groups made out of villagers from whom the Ustashe received operative assistance. Consequently, these groups would come to be known as the Wild Ustashe, because they did not formally belong to the movement or fall under its hierarchy, but worked towards the same goals and with support of the regular Ustashe members.

The groups of Wild Ustashe conducted series of crimes against the Serbs which can be considered as a campaign of pogrom-like manifestations of mass violence. They were one of the key agents in conducting the wild ethnic cleansing which was indirectly organized by the leadership of the Ustashe movement. The enormity of the wild ethnic cleansing

³⁴² See footnote 118.

reached extreme proportions during the summer of 1941 and partially caused the rebellion of Chetnik and Partisan resistance groups which opposed to the Ustashe policies. However, the appearance of the Wild Ustashe and their arbitrariness of violence and lack of any rationale also caused a rift within the Ustashe movement proper. Paramilitary oriented Ustashe have seen the grassroots Wild Ustashe as an integral part of the movement and supported them. They were seen as a demonstration of mass support for the movement through expression of violence towards the targeted ethnic minorities, and an endless pool of new members of the Ustashe movement. In opposition, the state-oriented members of the Ustashe movement did not necessarily defy persecution of Serbs, but despised the arbitrariness, wildness and chaos as methods of the Wild Ustashe. State-oriented Ustashe considered that the state should have a monopoly on violence and that there had to be a system in conducting ethnic cleansing, one which should run through institutions and hierarchy.

Facing an all-out rebellion of the Chetniks and Serbs, discontent from the state-oriented Ustashe from inside the movement, and pressure from the Axis allies, Ante Pavelić decided that the activities of the Wild Ustashe had to be, if not stopped, than at least restricted. Many Wild Ustashe eventually joined the Ustashe movement, and continued their performance of mass murder through its hierarchy. Through this decision the Ustashe leadership decided to increasingly rely on the state-organized methods of ethnic cleansing, instead on the wild one. This change of trends was also made possible because of the advanced development of the key concentration camp systems which could devour greater number of victims. The Jews and Roma, who were the prime target of the state-organized genocide from the beginning, were now being overshadowed by the influx of Serbs into the camp systems across NDH.

Cases of wild ethnic cleansing, mass violence, and the Wild Ustashe were not appearing exclusively in NDH. In the same period, similar processes and auxiliary groups with

the same functions and *modus operandi* appeared in Eastern Europe with the permission of the invading Nazi Germany. Mobs and groups of nationalists conducted mass violence in form of pogroms against the Jews, and they appeared in Belarus, Ukraine and Baltic states. But moreover, these cases, as was proved through numerous socio-psychological explanations, are also not something severely restricted to the Second World War, but confirm pathos in human behavior which appears in specific circumstances. Therefore, the case of the Wild Ustashe does not only reveal only something about the regime, perpetrators and victims, but reveals something about humans on a universal level.

The case of the Wild Ustashe reveals the complexity of agents in conducting ethnic cleansing. Moreover, their appearance detects a rift within the Ustashe movement regarding mass violence. Furthermore, the clash between those who supported the methods of the Wild Ustashe, and those who wanted to suppress it was in fact a battle between two different conceptions of fascism. Paramilitary oriented Ustashe emphasized the revolutionary character of fascism, mass violence and grassroots, striving for a total and radical transformation of the society with all means available. On the other hand, statist oriented Ustashe strived for a total control of the state, monopolization on the means of violence, strict hierarchy and empowerment of institutions. They wanted to conduct ethnic cleansing, but in a systematic way through the state-institutions and agencies with minimum interference of arbitrariness, which they considered to be undermining the state itself. The tension between these two different concepts in the Ustashe movement is characteristic for virtually all fascist movements where the tensions between the party and the state, and struggle for their superiority existed.

It was neither my intention, nor is it the outcome of this thesis, to bring finality to the research on the topics of wild ethnic cleansing and the Wild Ustashe. My aim was to examine the gap between the state-organized and other methods of conducting mass violence and

annihilation. Ultimately, I wanted to demonstrate the complexity of actors in the process of ethnic cleansing appearing in NDH. Moreover, I wish to open a discussion on this issue within the historiography of the field, and hope that other researchers will recognize the immense importance of this topic. This research is severely limited, in terms of given time to finish this project, limited space of the M.A. thesis itself, and consequently small sample of materials as the consequence of the two previously mentioned factors. For the purpose of this thesis I focused my analysis on the archives of the Ministry of Interior, Secret Service and Presidency of the Government of NDH. Further materials on the matter could be found in the archives regarding the Army and the Ustashe Militia because of their active collaboration with the Wild Ustashe in various operations of ethnic cleansing. Moreover, I focused my research on the materials in the Croatian State Archive in Zagreb, while rich materials can be found in archives in other cities such as Belgrade, where much material regarding the history of NDH is still being kept. Probably the richest fond regarding the analysis of ethnic cleansing in NDH can be found within the fond of Commission for the Establishment of Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Croatia (Fond HR-HAD-306) which contains over 751 boxes of documents.

There is a significant space for the continuation of this research in many different directions. Future research will reach a fertile ground in respect to examination of group conflict within the Ustashe movement regarding various issues, within which, the issue of ethnic cleansing, is only one of many. Comparison of the phenomenon of grassroots movements such as the Wild Ustashe with others appearing in the same period could prove to be especially interesting, since according to my knowledge no such research has been conducted.

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