

Croatia and “Ethnic Cleansing”

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Introduction

There is a computer set up in the permanent Holocaust exhibition in London’s Imperial War Museum, in which, along with Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the mentally disabled, “hundreds of thousands” of Serbian residents of the “Independent State of Croatia” (NDH) are listed as victims of genocide. However, in the permanent exhibition dealing with genocide, the massacre of the Serbs earns no mention. It appears that the museum accepts the massacres as fact, but their displays are seemingly set up so as to attract little attention. As this style of exhibition demonstrates, while there are not many who do not know of Auschwitz, there are very few who know of “Jasenovac”.

“Jasenovac” is the name for a system of incarceration chambers and concentration camps which existed in the “Independent State of Croatia”. After World War II, it was estimated that between 600,000 and 700,000 people died in this, the largest of the incarceration facilities in Croatia. In the 1990s too, the “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, a major German daily newspaper, gave an estimate of 500,000, while the Holocaust Studies Centre in Washington’s Holocaust Memorial Museum estimates that “at least 250,000” Serbians were killed by the “Croatian authorities” between 1941 and 1943.¹⁾

However, the Republic of Croatia, which gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, has not acknowledged this massacre. In April 1991 (the fiftieth anniversary of Germany’s invasion of Yugoslavia), Tudjman, who became later the first President of Croatia, declared the number of victims to be 30,000. Thus, the state’s official interpretation of “Jasenovac” was that it was a “myth” created by the Serbs. Furthermore, on the 7th of November 1991, President Tudjman claimed the number of victims of Jasenovac was 20,000, at the International Conference for Yugoslavia in the Hague. Later, the Croatian military occupied the Jasenovac Museum, and burned a part of the historical documents and physical evidence of the incidents. At the same time, one of the most significant researchers of the history of NDH Fikret Jelić-Butić was killed. Finally, “The Committee for Establishing the Victims During and After the War” set the number of those killed at Jasenovac as “not exceeding 2,238”.²⁾

Until now, Croatia has endeavoured to conceal genocide as a state-conducted crime, but in this thesis, the aim will be to demonstrate the genocide-like characteristics of these national crimes systematically, with primary reference to Ustase’s laws, the materials left by Ustase, and works left by Croatian witnesses. (The period of consideration will be chiefly until 1942, when “ethnic cleansing” could be intentionally carried out; the genocide conducted against the Jews and the Romany will be omitted.)

1. Reports from Nazi Germany

According to a report by the German Foreign Ministry on July 2nd, 1941, reports of the expansion of terrorism so terrible “as to make your hair stand on end” by the Croats in the Serbian residential areas were received from all regions, and Councilor Troll in Zagreb (temporary proxy ambassador) predicted that due to the increasing militancy in the persecution of the Serbs, Croatia would soon become an uncontrollable lawless zone. There, the “excessive expulsion of Serbs”, was considered “shocking” even by the Nazi Secret Police.³⁾

The German Plenipotentiary for Southeastern Europe, Neubacher, notes in his memoirs that “of the slogan ‘convert a third to Catholicism, expel a third, kill a third!’, you can say that only the last of these objectives was realized, but to say that one million Serbs were killed as the Ustase leaders did, was arrogant exaggeration; according to the reports to hand, on estimate the number of defenceless individuals killed would be 750,000”.⁴⁾ So, what kind of country was the Independent State of Croatia”, where these massacres took place?

2. The establishment of the Independent State of Croatia

(1) Its geographical boundaries

The founding of the “Independent State of Croatia” was announced during World War II on the 10th of April 1941, at which point Croatia achieved independence from Yugoslavia. This was four days after the invasion of Yugoslavia by Germany. However, only the Axis countries, including Japan, recognized its independence, and it did not become a recognized country under international law.

The area of Croatia at that time was a large area including almost all of present-day Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Originally, Hitler had envisioned a solution to the problem by creating a smaller Croatia not including Bosnia, under the “Temporary Dissolution of Yugoslavia” on April the 12th. However, Mussolini, who was entrusted with the details of land distribution, gave permission for the unification with Bosnia, in exchange for allowing an area on the Adriatic Sea coast to be merged with his own country. As a result, “ethnic Croats” made up no more than half of the total population of the country of six and a half million, and a third of the population were Serbian.⁵⁾

(2) The responsibility of the government

Political power in the Independent State of Croatia was assumed by a terrorist organization called Ustase (“the uprisers”). The leader of Ustase was a lawyer named Ante Pavelić, who pursued independence as a leader of the Croatian Right’s Party between the wars. When the monarchic dictatorship came into being in 1929, he fled to Italy, where he began working for Ustase with the support of Mussolini. Ustase would not question the means if it were for the cause of the independence of Croatia: in 1934 they were responsible for the assassinations of

King Aleksandar of Yugoslavia and the French Foreign Minister Barthou, together with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, and became an internationally notorious terrorist organization.⁶⁾

The ideal political structure for the Ustase was the Italian Fascist or Nazi German political system, but at this time, Germany itself did not consider Ustase to be a suitable negotiating partner, and it was left to Italy and Hungary for the most part to provide support for Ustase. It was not until April 1941 that Ustase received backing from the Germans and suddenly burst onto the political stage. At this time, Pavelić took on the title "Poglavnik", equivalent to Mussolini's title of "duce" (leader), and presided over what was a puppet-government for Nazi Germany.⁷⁾

However, besides the fact that there were only a few hundred party members of Ustase, the Rome Protocol of May 18th was considered "insulting to the Croatian Nation", and the voices of Croatian citizens calling for the area to be placed under German protection were heard everywhere. Furthermore, vigorous in-fighting existed within the government, and there was no common political strategy other than expelling "enemies" and creating a larger Croatia. It was the Catholic church, with its nationwide organization, which supported the Ustase, whose own support base was weak. The Catholic clergy provided members of Ustase's executive bodies, and also helped to attract new members.⁸⁾

(3) State policy on "solving the Serbian problem"

The fundamental political guidelines of the Ustase government announced on April 11th, 1941, decreed that Serbian citizens were enemies of the state, and that a "solution to the Serbian problem" was the most important issue facing the nation. Leading figures in the government unveiled anti-Serbian propaganda, in particular, calling for the elimination of Serbs, at political rallies all over the country.

The Minister of Justice, Mirko Puk claimed, at a meeting in Glina, that now was the time for the Serbs, "who had always opposed to the struggle for liberation of the Croatian people", to return to Serbia.⁹⁾ Foreign Minister Lorković, in a speech at Donji Miholjac, made statements denying the right of Serbs as citizens of Croatia, saying "we must cleanse all elements of a people who are heretics and fundamentally different in nature to ourselves, who stunt the healthy growth of the Croatian people and who have for many decades thrown the Croatian people into evil. These are the Serbs and Jews who live in our territory."¹⁰⁾

Žanić, the special representative of Ustase for Public Security, stressed, in a speech at Nova Gradiška, the necessity of eliminating all Serbs regardless of the means: "in order to make this country a true Croatian country, and to cleanse it of Serbs, there is no means that we, the Ustase, will not adopt. For several hundred years the Serbs have placed us in peril, and will surely threaten us again should the opportunity arise."¹¹⁾

Along with this incitement to kill Serbs, a modern Crusader-like meaning was also attached to the campaign. In a speech at Karlovac on June 13th, Justice Minister Puk stated that "the border between the eastern world and the western world is the Drina River... The fundamental standard for our actions is loyalty to the church and the Catholic faith. History teaches us that

we would have been wiped out long ago were it not for the fact that we are Catholics".¹²⁾ Ivo Guberina, leader of Pavelić's personal bodyguards, and a Catholic priest, saw as his mission "to stand at the frontline of Catholic faith in the east, decided by divine providence." He also stated that "to stand by is a crime against the Creator", essentially demanding direct action.¹³⁾ This emphasis on the Catholic "mission" of the Croats, as well as the movement to restore state Catholicism among Croats, wedged as they were between Western civilization and the "savage" Balkans, was also a manifestation of the desire for a return to the Western fold. This is expressed in Pavelić's comments to Hitler on April 13th, "I would like to prove that Croats are not Slavs, but ultimately, genetically and racially belong to the Germanic race."¹⁴⁾

On June 6th, 1941, Minister of Culture and Education, Mile Budak, emphasized the damage that could be done to Catholics if Orthodox Christians were left to expand their territory to the West. The policy that he laid down in his speech of July 22nd in Gospić, "We will kill a third of the Serbs, expel a third beyond the national borders, and convert the remainder to Catholicism and make them Croats; thus, we will be able to completely rid Croatia of Serbs, and the 100% Catholicization of the country will be possible within ten years", became Croatian state policy.¹⁵⁾ This also justified the persecution of the Serbs which had been continually taking place at civilian level since the establishment of the new state.

(4) Laws justifying the persecution of the Serbs

In the "protection of people and state" law issued by Pavelić on April 17th, 1941, it was stipulated that "any person who threatens the honour and interests of the Croatian people... or the livelihood or authority of the Independent State of Croatia, regardless of whether their actions are at the trial stage only, shall be charged with high treason, and put to death".¹⁶⁾

With regard to the Serbs, their existence in itself had been publicized at national level as presenting a threat to the state, so it was not difficult to interpret the very fact of being a Serb as constituting high treason. The anti-Serbian rhetoric of the Catholic clergy assisted in creating the image of Serbs as an enemy race, and simplified the application of this law to the Serbs. Priest Kamber, at the same time Ustase's regional governor Doboj, who held all practical power in the region, claimed that "there is no bigger problem facing Croats and Croatia than that of the Serbs." He also listed "lying, sycophancy, deception, intimidation, self-satisfaction, crime, unfairness and exclusivism" as characteristics of the "race" and the reason they were criticized, hated, and fought against. He also claimed that their invasions into "Croatian ethnic territory" had divided the Croatian nation.¹⁷⁾ Statements such as this by the clergy served the function of justifying the killing of Serbs by militant Ustase members and civilians. Furthermore, a mobile court for summoning trials was set up, not under the jurisdiction of the ordinary legal and judicial system, but under control of the "military Ustase", enabling terrorist activity to be carried out within a legal framework.¹⁸⁾

The Serbs were never recognized as citizens. In the "citizen" regulations issued on April 30th 1941, "citizens" were defined as being "Aryan", as well as "those who can prove by their attitude that they have not shown any animosity towards the freedom movement of the Croatian race, and who are prepared to swear allegiance to the Independent State of Croatia".¹⁹⁾ The Serbs, of whom a large proportion were regarded as former Croats by the Ustase, were seen

as nothing more than Christians who had converted to Orthodox Christianity, and so were considered "Aryan", but were placed outside of legal protection because they were seen as continually blocking moves for the emancipation of the Croatian race.

(5) State institutions as leaders of Serbian persecution

"The Office for the Maintenance of Public Order" was established in a decree of May 4th 1941, with the aim of "maintaining the results of the battles waged by the Ustase and the uprising of the Croatian people, and the protection of the Croatian state". The establishment of the "military Ustase" and a police force mimicking the SS began.²⁰⁾ Originally the prisons for holding and interrogating political prisoners were placed under their control, but after August 26th of 1941, an expanded and strengthened office of public order, the "Ustase Surveillance Office" (UNS) was created to strengthen the role of the police and the intelligence services, and the entire prison system was placed under their control. The mission of the UNS was to "protect the freedom and independence in the Independent State of Croatia, the maintenance of public order and safety for the Croatian people, and to prevent all activities which could place the Ustase freedom movement in danger." Like the German Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), this was an Ustase organization which combined the roles of intelligence office and state police, and commanders directly appointed by the Poglavnik at its head. The UNS was positioned at the top of the entire state system, and the Poglavnik used the UNS to directly oversee the lives of his citizens.²¹⁾

The UNS had unlimited powers in relation to concentration camps: determining who were "undesirable or dangerous persons", and their periods of incarceration. It was not until November 26th 1941, some seven months after the establishment of the first prison, that the laws concerning camps were finally decided. At this time, incarceration was defined as a preventative measure to deal with "undesirable individuals" who are menaces to "public safety" and the "peace" of the Croatian people, and threats to the struggle for liberation of the Ustase."²²⁾ However, when one considers that from April 1941 camps of all sizes had been erected, this merely served to provide a legal framework for the in-progress persecution of the Serbs.

3. The extermination camp system

It is said that there were sixteen concentration camps and eight detention camps in Croatia, and these can be divided into the Gospić camps prior to August 1941, and the Jasenovac camps, which existed after that time. The Jasenovac camp system appeared after the middle of August 1941, when the Italian army invaded southern Croatia, and banned the use of extermination camps.²³⁾

(1) The Gospić Camps

a) Gospić Camp (May – August 1941)

Jews and Serbs were sent from all over Croatia to the Gospić Camps (a converted prison) from the latter half of May 1941 onwards. This prison acted as the entrance to the following two extermination camps, and incarceration here meant almost certain death. ²⁴⁾

b) Jadovno Extermination Camp (May – August 1941)

One of these was the Jadovno extermination camp, run concurrently with Gospić, and situated twenty kilometres south of it in the Velebit Mountains. Prisoners were killed by being dropped into the holes which naturally exist in the Karst topology. From July onwards, roughly a thousand Serbs and Jews arrived via Gospić daily, and the number killed is estimated at between 35,000 and 72,000. ²⁵⁾

c) Pag Island Extermination Camp (July – August 1941)

The other execution ground was the extermination camp at Pag Island in the Adriatic Sea, divided into the Slana Camp for men, and the Metajna Camp for women and children. It is apparent that more people were killed by having weights attached and being drowned in the canal linking the island and the mainland, than were killed on land. After it was closed on August 20th, the bodies which had been buried on land were cremated by the invading Italian army, because of fears of spreading infectious diseases. ²⁶⁾

(2) The Jasenovac Camps

a) Jasenovac Concentration Camps (Camps 1- 6)

Ordinarily, what one thinks of when one hears "Jasenovac", is its Camp Number Three, but in fact, "The Jasenovac Camps" were made up of six camps, numbered one to six. Aside from the issue of transport convenience, with it lying near the railway line between Zagreb and Belgrade, the reason Jasenovac was chosen was because of the geographical factor that it is surrounded by rivers on three sides and hence both difficult to attack from the outside and difficult to escape from. Furthermore, the authorities were able to spread the propaganda that this was designated a "labour camp", with the prisoners digging irrigation, and that they were conducting re-education of dangerous individuals via labour. ²⁷⁾

With the leaking of information concerning in-camp killings, Pavelić outlawed all killing within the camp at the beginning of February 1942. ²⁸⁾ Further, when the German army stationed near Belgrade noticed the number of bodies floating down the river and ordered that the bodies be buried, Donja Gradina across the Sava River from the camps, came to be used as both an execution ground and a graveyard.

b) Donja Gradina as an execution ground

Because Donja Gradina is surrounded on three sides by rivers and is in the shape of a peninsula, it is practically a deserted island on the mainland. To the south, where the only access was, a trench was dug and several observation towers were erected to create a "safety

zone". This "safety zone" extended down the Sava River, including Jasenovac and Gradina, and was outside the control of the regular government and police: the "military Ustases'" exclusivist control was in force there.²⁹⁾

Before it was transformed into a "safety zone", Serbs lived in Gradina and the village of Draksenić. In order to make Jasenovac and Gradina a special area of the "military Ustase", the leaders of Ustase and the Ministry of Defence decided to "cleanse" the people in a "clean-up" operation. January 14th, 1942, the day on which the "clean-up" operation began in Draksenić was New Year's Day in the Serbian Orthodox calendar, and all the men had left their houses to attend a New Year's gathering. Two hundred people were killed, bludgeoned to death in the church, and the only survivors were two women and a two year-old child. After the deportation of the citizens had been carried out, both villages were incorporated into the camp system area. Having thus appropriated territory for execution and burial grounds, the Ustase command issued a statement via the Ministry of the Interior to the regional authorities that "Jasenovac is able to accept an unlimited number of prisoners".³⁰⁾

c) Ethnic cleansing along the Sava River

In the area surrounding the Jasenovac Camps, ethnic cleansing of residents was undertaken, both to expand the military Ustase's "safety zone", and to secure arable land to provide economic sustenance for the camps. The area following the Sava River from Jasenovac to Stara Gradiška was, other than two villages, overwhelmingly dominated by Serbs in terms of its residents, but it was entirely emptied once the killing and deportation of its residents was completed on May 8th 1942. The "economic division" of the camps featured prisoners who worked there as forced labour. When autumn arrived and the fieldwork was no longer required, a vast number of now unnecessary labourers were sent to their graves; these killings were known as the "autumn graves".³¹⁾

d) Children's Camps

With the ethnic cleansing conducted in the area surrounding Jasenovac, "detention camps for children" became necessary. First, the Stara Gradiška Camp primarily incarcerated women and children from the autumn of 1941 onwards. After bringing the Kozara region under their military control, Pavelić and the Minister of the Interior Artuković (the Himmler of the Balkans) issued a decree on July 12th, 1942, ordering the construction of three special camps designed for the "re-education" of children, at Gornja Rijeka, Jastrebarsko and Sisak.

There were 19,432 confirmed deaths among children at the Jasenovac Camps. There were roughly 7,000 children who passed through one of the thirty five temporary homes in Zagreb. Those children who were ripped away from their parents and became prisoners had their identities erased, and existed merely as numbers. Infants and toddlers who had no awareness of their surroundings and no recollections of their parents were, if they were lucky, taken in by a Croatian family and were given a new life as a Croatian. In such instances, those children whose birthdays were unknown were issued with April 10th, the Independent Memorial Day, as their birthday. Almost all of these children, having been given a new name and been baptised as Catholics, were later raised as Croatians.³²⁾

4. Forced deportation and population exchanges

"Population exchanges" were decided upon between Germany and the "Independent State of Croatia" on June 4th, 1941. The aims of this policy were to "Germanize" Slovenia, which had merged into Germany to form a "Great Germany", and at the same time to "de-Serbianize" Croatia. That is, in exchange for a section of the Slovenian population expelled from Germany being resettled in neighbouring Croatia (about 170,000), Croatia was allowed to expel the same number of Serbian citizens into Serbia, which was under the rule of Germany. Originally, Germany had merely considered deporting Slovenians to Serbia, but when Croatia suggested "population exchange", these "exchanges" took place in Croatia alone.³³⁾

A "Reconstruction Office" was set up in order to conduct the "population exchanges", and, liaising with each administrative authority's "Department for Relocation", organised both the forced emigration and immigration. The movable property and real estate from those Serbs who had been deported was handed over to the "Colonisation Office", which dealt with "colonization" within the country, as state property. The arrested Serbs and their families were told that they had to leave for Serbia "within half an hour". Those who did not comply were detained in "accumulation centres", and when these became full they would be transferred to the concentration camps.³⁴⁾

In reality, however, those cases in which deportation was conducted with German agreement were rare. According to German documents, by the end of July there were already some 180,000 refugees including unregistered refugees in Serbia, of which there were only 13,234 Serbs who had been expelled from Croatia under the bilateral agreement even at the end of August. Beyond the scope of German military surveillance, vast numbers of Serbian citizens were forcibly deported, and in fact in many cases, torture, plunder and killings were conducted by the regional commands of the Ustase as well. Germany responded by closing all border crossing points other than Zemun in July, in order to prevent the unlimited influx of refugees. This measure was taken as a result of the German position that it was precisely this influx of Serbian refugees from Croatia that was to blame for the strengthening of resistance and the worsening of public order in German-controlled Serbia.

In mid-August Germany requested Croatia not to send any more Serbs into Serbia, but Croatia responded by emphasising their right to deport at least the agreed number. With the expulsion of Serbs continuing as before, Germans refused to accept any more Serbs other than those remaining in the designated holding camps in Croatia, on September 22nd. Finally, on October 7th, the German military once more issued an edict prohibiting deportation, and after this point Germany refused to accept even those Serbs held in the designated holding camps.³⁵⁾

5. Forced religious conversion.

It was not until August 1941 that "forced religious conversion" was employed in earnest as a means for the ethnic cleansing of Serbs. This was because, with the German military stationed in Serbia restricting the number of Serbs they would accept from Croatia, the Croats were forced to deal with the "Serbian problem" internally. In mid-September, the

Ministry of the Interior requested that an estimated one million people be put into the process of religious conversion "as an emergency measure to relieve this problem"; and, centrally a "Religion Department" was established within the Reconstruction Office to organise and coordinate the procedures involved in the religious conversions. Forced conversion as a state policy spread throughout the country between the autumn of 1941 and the winter of 1942, with whole villages and areas converted at a time. Most Serbs accepted conversion to Catholicism in order to protect their lives and property, with the number of converted reaching 240,000 (1941 – 1942).

There were, however, many Serbs who were never given the option of religious conversion. Firstly, there were those Serbs who had been refused a personal "qualification" paper, which was necessary for religious conversion. This document, issued by regional authorities (cities/towns/villages), was unrelated to the Catholic church, but was a necessary document for this process. Excepting those with special circumstances, these documents were restricted to small and mid-scale farmers. Secondly, there were certain areas where "religious conversion" was not chosen as a means of solving the "Serbian problem". In particular, the self-governing authority of the area near the border between today's Croatia and Bosnia chose, with the agreement of the Ustase government, to solve the problem with the physical erasure of the Serbs.³⁶⁾

However, with the increase in internal resistance activity, Pavelić forwarded in parliament a proposal to establish a "Croatian Orthodox Church", which would pledge its allegiance to the "Independent State of Croatia" and to Pavelić himself, thus unveiling a policy of incorporating Serbs as a part of the country. At the beginning of April 1942, the "Croatian Orthodox Church" was officially inaugurated.³⁷⁾

6. Mass slaughter in the regions

Mass slaughter in the regions was seen immediately after the Independent State of Croatia had been established, especially in the Krajna region, reaching a peak between June and July 1941. In particular, after the majority of the German soldiers had withdrawn from Croatia, massacres of the scale of several hundred people frequently took place, chiefly in the Krajna region, western Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was also about this time that the German military, having noticed the thousands of bodies which had been dumped in the Una, Sana and Kupa Rivers, and had floated down the Sava to Belgrade, requested that the bodies not be dumped in the river but buried, leading to the construction of mass graves all over Croatia.

Here, as an example of these slaughters, I will consider the slaughter of the Serbs which took place on February 7th 1942 in three villages on the outskirts of Banja Luka. On this day, a division of the Ustase infantry carried out a large scale massacre (2,215 people dead) in a very short time. There was around one metre of snow on the ground on this day, as it had continued to snow for some time. After four o'clock in the morning, while most villagers were still sleeping, the infantry division ("Cheta") of 120 men, which had come from Zagreb, under the guidance of a group of armed local Croatians, surrounded the villages and attacked from all sides at once. The defenceless citizens had no place to run, and were killed with hatchets and hammers, some in their beds, some frantically trying to escape inside their homes. The fact that

very few were shot, and almost all were beaten to death with blunt instruments such as hatchets or hammers was a feature of the massacre.

The following telegram, sent by the government authorities, records that 2,215 were killed in ten hours:

"The military Ustase led by Lieutenant Josip Mišlov along with clergyman Vjekoslav Filipović occupied the Rakovac Coalmine at four a.m. on February 7th, and killed thirty seven Greek and Eastern Orthodox labourers with hatchets and axes –STOP- Subsequently, they continued killing Greek Eastern Orthodox men, women and children, numbering 715 in Motike village and approximately 1,500 in Drakulić village and Šargovac village –STOP- The killing finished at two p.m. on the same day –STOP- From that time until today, the Ustase have taken foodstuffs, livestock and household effects from the houses of those killed, and stored them in their warehouses –STOP-”³⁸⁾

According to letters from the government authorities, those Serbs who sought help from their Croatian neighbours feared revenge from the Ustase, or were killed by those whose help they sought. Further, three days after the killings it was noted “the bodies of the dead lie all around, and just now the clean-up has begun. The bodies have been gnawed by dogs and pigs.”³⁹⁾ The next letter from the head of the Sana and Luka region emphasised the genocidal elements of this massacre.

“The victims of the killings, the Greek Eastern Orthodox Christians who lived in the village, were a loyal and entirely peaceful people. The village itself was surrounded by Croatian villages, and was not in a position to interact with external revolutionary forces. The leaders of the military Ustase seemed to have considered that had they left alone those that were killed on this occasion, they might have conducted illegal or treacherous activities and this concern was the basis for the attack. However, these concerns have no basis in fact. These types of acts are unrelated to religious reversion, and bring about limitless uncertainty and distrust among all levels of society.”⁴⁰⁾

Conclusion

When one considers from a historical perspective the situations in the Croatian concentration camps, a complex set of inter-related elements must be borne in mind. Considering the case of the third camp of Jasenovac alone, officially declared by the Croatian government to be a “Serbian myth”, the following factors will all be relevant: the clean-up operation in the villages on the opposite bank to the camp, the procurement of a “safe zone” and an execution ground, the establishment of an “economic division” and the “ethnic cleansing” of the local populace which led to the establishment of “children’s camps”. Even German officials were forced to admit that as a result of this process, many Serbs who had lost relatives became involved in partisan movements, forcing the pressurized German army in

1942 to alter their plans and send troops from Greece to Croatia.⁴¹⁾ However, once the news of the massacre of the Serbs became internationally known, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the "Independent State of Croatia" published a declaration in several languages in June 1942, portraying Croatians not as the aggressors but as the victims of a "Serbian expansionist invasion". In this declaration, Croatia rejected any responsibility for its anti-Serbian policy, blaming terrorist acts by "nationalist/communist" Serbs.⁴²⁾

After the war, Croatia, which had not been defeated, did not "atone for their past sins" in the way that defeated countries were forced to. While Nazi German war criminals were tried in Nuremberg, in Tito's Yugoslavia the concentration camps were deliberately destroyed, and anyone talking of the ethnic cleansing against the Serbs was labeled a Serbian nationalist and punished. Tito himself never once visited Jasenovac, nor ever officially spoke of it.

Another factor which made atoning for historical crimes impossible was pressure from the Vatican. In the latter part of the war, the Vatican organized an escape route for about two hundred members of the Ustase, including Pavelić, to Argentina. As part of the escape plan, monasteries were used as safe houses, and the members of the Ustase disguised themselves as monks. Later, in 1959, blessed by Pope John XXIII and holding the rosary he had been given by Pope Pius XII, Pavelić peacefully drew his final breath in Madrid.⁴³⁾ Furthermore, when a Croatian named Viktor Novak wrote a work called *Magnum Crimen* (published in Zagreb in 1948), based on reference materials in the Vatican Library, detailing the Catholic Church's involvement in state-sponsored crime, it was banned from publication both in the Vatican and Yugoslavia.⁴⁴⁾

The Republic of Croatia, which had tried to stress the innocuousness of Jasenovac, felt by many to be the very symbol of the persecution of the Serbs, gained independence in 1992 after garnering the support of the international community. The Croatian civil war, which continued until 1995, produced significant human losses on both the Croatian and Serbian sides, eventually leading to "ethnic cleansing" carried out against the Serbs. The memories of these tragedies are still fresh in the international consciousness. Recent research within the new Croatia has tended to focus on (1) stressing that rather than being a puppet government of the Axis powers, the "Independent State of Croatia" was in fact closer to a protectorate, and that therefore the Croatia should be acquitted of all charges against it; and (2) the positive evaluation of the attainment of independence under Pavelić. The existence of numerous massacres has been suppressed by the authorities in the former Yugoslavia, and this suppression in turn has become a factor in the escalating levels of violence seen with each outbreak of civil unrest. Therefore, it is fair to suggest that a complex understanding of the actual conditions surrounding these massacres could hold a vital significance in the prevention of future unrest.

Notes

- 1) Holm Sundhaussen, *Experiment Jugoslawien*, Mannheim 1993, 75; *Zemaljska Komisija Hrvatske za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača*, Zagreb, 1946, 38; <http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/index.php?ModuleId=10005449>
- 2) Milan Bulajić, *Jasenovac. Ustaški logori smrti. Srpski mit ?*, Beograd, 1999, 300; Compare Franjo Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti. Rasprava o povijesti i filozofiji zlosilja*, drugo izdanje, Zagreb, 1989, 79 ff., 316-317; Josip Jurčević, *Nastanak jasenovačkog mita. Problemi proučavanja žrtava Drugog svjetskog rata na području Hrvatske*, Zagreb, 1998; Josip Pečarić, *Srpski mit o Jasenovcu. Skrivanje*

- istine o beogradskim konc-logorima, 1998; Zločin je zločin prečutati. Izbor dokumenata najviših državnih organa Jugoslavije o ratnim zločinima genocida i drugim stradanjima srpskog naroda u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini, Novi Sad, 1992, 431; Izvješće o radu od osnutka (11.2.1992) do rujna 1999. godine. Komisija za utvrđivanje ratnih i poratnih žrtava, Zagreb 8.10.1999.*
- 3) Ladislaus Hory/Martin Broszat, *Der Kroatische Ustascha-Staat 1941-1945*, Stuttgart, 1964, 100.
 - 4) Hermann Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost 1940-1945. Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten*, Göttingen, 1956, 31.
 - 5) Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens 1918-1980*, Stuttgart, Berlin, 1982, 114f., 121.
 - 6) Hory/Broszat, 19.
 - 7) Ibid., 13; Holm Sundhaussen, *Experiment Jugoslawien*, 71.
 - 8) Ibid.; Sundhaussen, *Geschichte*, 117-119.
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 - 10) *Hrvatski Narod*, 28. 6. 1941.
 - 11) Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941/1945*, Zagreb, 1978, 164.
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 - 16) *Narodne Novine*, No. 4, in: *Dokumenti. Ustaša*, Zagreb, 1995, 149.
 - 17) Dragutin Kamber, *Slom NDH*, Zagreb, 1945, drugo izdanje 1995, 21-22.
 - 18) *Narodne Novine*, No. 32, No. 60, No. 68, in: *Dokumenti*, 182, 206, 207.
 - 19) *Narodne Novine*, No. 16. in: *Dokumenti*, 160. Compare Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, Bd. 2, 9. Auflage, Frankfurt, 1999, 757.
 - 20) *Narodne Novine*, 7.5.1941; Anđelko Barbić, "Prilog proučavanju funkcije ustaške obrane u osiguravanju koncentracionog logora u Jasenovcu", in: *Okrugli stol "Jasenovac 1986"*, Jasenovac, 1986, 161-170, here 162.
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 - 28) Dušan D. Samardžija, *Bosanskodubičko područje u NOR-u i socijalističkoj revoluciji 1941-1945*, Bosanska Dubica, 1984; Compare. Nikola Nikolić, *Jasenovački logor smrti*, Sarajevo 1946, 40-57.
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 - 30) Samardžija, *ibid.*, 154-156; Milan Bulajić, "Jasenovac-System of Croatian Ustasha Camps of Genocide (mskr)", 1-23, 1.
 - 31) Antun Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac 1941-1945. Dokumenti I*, 302-303; *Dokumenti II*, 709; *Dokumenti III*, Beograd, 1985, 557, 705.
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 - 33) *Izveštaj Jugoslovenske državne komisije za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača Međunarodnom vojnom sudu u Nurnbergu*, Beograd, 1947, 49, 168-169.
 - 34) *Narodne Novine*, 24.6.1941, 26.6.1941.
 - 35) Jelić-Butić, 170 f.
 - 36) Ibid., 174 f.
 - 37) Ibid., 176.
 - 38) Radiogram: Velika Župa Sana i Luka, Veliki Župan pukovnik Alemann, 77/42 od 11.2.1942 Ravnateljstvu za Javni Red i Sigurnost.
 - 39) Radiogram: Velika Župa Sana i Luka, Veliki Župan pukovnik Alemann, T84/42 od 10.2.1942 Povjereničtvu Ustaške Narodne Službe V.T. Broj 11/42.
 - 40) Radiogram: Kotarska Oblast Banja Luka, Kotarski predstojnik, Taj.br. 129/42 od 10.2.1942 Ustaškoj Nadzornoj Službi Banja Luka.
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- 42) *Der Unabhängige Staat Kroatien. Ein Bollwerk des Neuen Europa.* Ministerium des Äußeren im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien (ed.) zusammengestellt auf Grund von Beweismaterial, Zagreb im Juni 1942.
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