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Seminar

## Creating understanding of the WWII in the Balkans and Europe – contribution of exhibitions

- selected papers -

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# Violence and crime: Female Ustaša guards in the Jasenovac concentration camp

Martina Bitunjac

For centuries, the use of violence was interpreted as an exclusively male domain because of the involvement of men in politics, wars and conquests. When women were mentioned in historiography in a context of violence and crime, they were primarily described as victims who were dependent on male protection. Even when women were the actual perpetrators of violence, this was seen not only as an affront against the law, but as an upset to the natural order of the gender hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> In the most devastating military conflict so far, World War II, the stereotypical image of the passive, pacifist and peaceful woman was still maintained ideologically, but it no longer corresponded to the reality of life of thousands of mobilized and also militarized women in Europe, and thus also in Croatia.

When, in April 1941, the multi-ethnic state was defeated by the Axis powers and divided territorially, both a brutal civil war and a war against the Italian, German, Bulgarian and Hungarian occupation broke out. The Ustaša movement founded and led by Ante Pavelić took power in the Italian-German vassal state, the *Independent State of Croatia*, on April 10, 1941. The Ustaša state was neither independent nor homogeneous, since its territory, which included Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Syrmia, was in fact divided between Hitler and Mussolini and in these territories, the Croats held only a slight majority.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the takeover by the Ustaše, the systematic persecution of the Jewish, Serb and Roma population began. The discrimination against unwanted persons had already been legitimized by the state in the *Law on the protection of Aryan blood and the honor of the Croatian people* and in the *Law on racial affiliation* from April 30, 1941.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, Ute Gerhard (ed.), *Frauen in der Geschichte des Rechts. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1997.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion see: Tomasevich, Jozo, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941.–1945. Okupacija i kolaboracija*, Zagreb 2010.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion, see: Goldstein, Ivo/Goldstein, Slavko, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, Zagreb 2001; Tauber, Eli, *Holokaust u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Sarajevo 2014. Regarding the violence in the Ustaša movement, see: Korb, Alexander, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941–1945*, Hamburg 2013.

The Ustaša movement demonstrated its ruthlessness not only against its political and ideological enemies, but also to the women who refused to conform to a patriarchal Catholic and fascist-controlled way of life. On the one hand, the policy of the Ustaše aimed at mobilizing women for the auxiliary military service, on the other hand, women were oppressed by the Ustaše in the respect that they placed the role of women in society below that of the men and saw their function as giving birth to as many children as possible for their “leader and state”. Nonetheless, many women within the Ustaša movement did not correspond to the feminine ideal set by the regime. In reality, women were also exercising power and exerting violence within their functions. The violence that female Ustaša members carried out during the war remained mostly hidden. They were not, like the female Partisans<sup>4</sup>, trained as fighters but worked for the Croatian and Ustaša military as stenographers, radio operators, news assistants and also as pilots.<sup>5</sup> Two women’s organizations of the Ustaše, the *Female Ustaša Youth* and the *Female Branch of the Croatian Ustaša Movement*, provided the soldiers with medicine, clothes and food and were responsible for their moral support. The *Ustaša Supervisory Service*, based on the principle of the Nazis’ *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, employed women as clerks, spies and as guards in the concentration camps Jasenovac and Lepoglava.<sup>6</sup> Women thus were not only involved in the bureaucratic management of the crimes, but participated directly in the murder of men, women and children. Using documents, newspaper articles and interviews, this study will examine the extent to which female concentration camp guards participated in acts of violence and how this female violence was perceived as well as how the women themselves interpreted their actions. The women who served as guards at the Jasenovac concentration camp will be focused on. There is some evidence such as statements from former concentration camp inmates and also from the guards themselves which can be used to reconstruct these questions, yet this topic has only received limited attention in previous perpetrator research.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on the role of women in the Yugoslav army see Jancar-Webster, Barbara, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia: 1941–1945*, Denver 1990, pp. 75–100 and Wiesinger, Barbara N., *Partisaninnen. Widerstand in Jugoslawien (1941–1945)*, Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 2008, pp.63–91.

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion on women in the Ustaša military see Bitunjac, Martina, *Le donne e il movimento ustascia*, Rome 2013, pp. 169–205 and Yeomans, Rory, *Visions of Annihilation. The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism 1941–1945*, Pittsburgh 2013, pp. 157–167.

<sup>6</sup> The first Ustaše concentration camp was founded near Koprivnica in the Danica factory just five days after the creation of the *Independent State of Croatia*. Further camps where inmates were collected, temporarily held, forced into labor or killed included those established in Krušćica near Travnik, Jasenovac, Đakovo, Sisak, Lepoglava, Jadovno, Loborgrad, in Tenja near Osijek. The first mass murders of inmates took place in the concentration camps in Slana, Metajna (on the island of Pag) and in Jadovno on the Velebit. See: Goldstein, Ivo/ Goldstein, Slavko: *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, Zagreb 2001, p. 276 ff.

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed information on female Ustaša guards see: Bitunjac, Le donne e il movimento ustascia, pp. 179–205.

Jasenovac, which consisted of five territorial camp units<sup>8</sup>, was the largest extermination and labor camp in Southeast Europe. Between 80,000 and 100,000 people – Serbs, Jews, Roma and political dissidents – lost their lives in Jasenovac. When not murdered by the Ustaše, they died as a result of diseases, epidemics, miserable hygienic conditions and hard labor. In Camp III, the largest unit, mostly male inmates worked in the chain factory, the brickyard, the sawmill, the leather factory and in construction. In December 1941, the Ustaše built a women's camp at Jasenovac V / Stara Gradiška, which had been a prison during the Habsburg monarchy. The female prisoners worked in the kitchen and the fields and did the laundry and the sewing. Inmates in Jasenovac suffered horrific torture, abuse and rapes. In this camp there were also infants and children wasting away, starving to death or who were killed in the most brutal manner.

Until August 1941, the *Department of Public Order and Safety* was responsible for establishing and administrating all Ustaša concentration camps. Afterwards this was carried out by Department III (*Ustaša Defense*) of the *Ustaša Supervisory Service* which was headed by General-Lieutenant Eugen Dido Kvaternik. Mijo Babić was the first Commander in Chief of the concentration camps in the *Independent State of Croatia*; he was followed by Vjekoslav Luburić, also known as Maks. Between 1,500 and 1,800 military personnel of the *Ustaša Defense* were responsible for guarding and killing the occupants.<sup>9</sup> Among others, the commanders of the respective storage units included Ljubo Miloš, Ivica Matković, Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović and Dinko Šakić. These men are the same ones that former inmates mentioned in connection with gruesome murders of defenseless people.<sup>10</sup> Women were also shown to be brutal perpetrators in the extermination apparatus of the Ustaše. In the autumn of 1942, women were used to guard female prisoners at work in and outside of the Jasenovac camp. Contrary to their traditional female role prescribed by the Ustaša as the ideal of womanhood, they were taking part in the murders themselves. About 28 Ustaša women worked in the concentration camps Jasenovac / Stara Gradiška and Lepoglava.<sup>11</sup> The recruitment of

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<sup>8</sup> The concentration camp complex Jasenovac included the following units: camp I Krapje, camp II Bročice, camp III Cigлана (brickyard), camp IV Kožara (leather factory) and camp V Stara Gradiška. The first inmates arrived in the Krapje and Bročice units in August 1941 after the concentration camps on the island of Pag and in the Velebit were shut down. These were Serbian and Jewish men, with 'Croatian' men coming shortly afterwards. Before winter broke out, camp I and camp II were closed due to flooding. The Ustaše transferred the ca. 1,500 inmates still able to work to camp III, the physically weak were liquidated. See: Mataušić, Nataša, *Jasenovac 1941.–1945. Logor smrti i radni logor*, Jasenovac/Zagreb 2003, p. 30 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Kovačić, Davor, *Zapovjednici i dužnosnici jasenovačke skupine logora 1941.–1945.*, in: *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 1, 2000, pp. 97–112, p.100.

<sup>10</sup> Bitunjac, Martina, *Das Ustaša-Personal im Konzentrationslager Jasenovac*, in: Benz, Angelika/Vulesica, Marija (eds.), *Bewachung und Ausführung. Alltag der Täter in nationalsozialistischen Lagern*, Berlin 2011, pp. 52–68.

<sup>11</sup> Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (HDA), Zagreb. Služba državne sigurnosti republičkog sekretarijata za unutrašnje

women (and men) for concentration camp duty was accomplished by word of mouth and through family relations. Many Ustaša women were related to each other or were related or engaged to male concentration camp staff. There were also other ways to become a concentration camp guard. Maja Buždon reported that after having joined the Ustaša movement in October 1942, she was assigned to work in the Stara Gradiška concentration camp.<sup>12</sup> According to estimates made by the *National Commission for Crimes of Occupiers and their Helpers*, most female employees were not older than 25 at the start of their duty between 1942 and 1944. However, there were exceptions.<sup>13</sup>

The guards Milka Pribanić, a former waitress from Zagreb, Božena Obradović from Kordun, and Maja Buždon were particularly feared by the inmates. It should be noted that not all perpetrators are mentioned by name in memoirs and witness statements. They are rather referred to as the Ustaša or executioner in general. This indicates that the inmates did not know the names of many concentration camp guards either at all or in part. This has made it impossible in some cases to identify concentration camp employees or to determine which crimes they were involved in. However, there are many witnesses attesting to the crimes personally committed by the guards mentioned above. Maja Buždon, a factory forewoman from Bakar, was the chief custodian for the entire women's camp in Stara Gradiška.<sup>14</sup> With her striking appearance, Buždon represented the stereotype of a masculinized woman to the female and male inmates. The former political prisoner Pava Peršić-Molnar remembered in our conversation that the chief custodian behaved "like a real soldier" (*kao pravi vojnik*). She describes her appearance with the words:

"Maja Buždon was a woman who always wore boots and always had a revolver with her. Physically, she was pretty, but she was cruel, very cruel."<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to the Ustaša ideal of the loving woman, Buždon was considered to be an ideal Ustaša member due to her willingness to destroy human life. The verbal abuse, torture and killing of concentration camp inmates were all part of the process of gaining the respect and peer

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poslove Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske (SDS RSUP SRH) - 1561, Ustroj i djelatost MUP-a NDH, box 52, Signature 013.2.7, undated.

<sup>12</sup> Miletić, Antun, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac 1941.–1945.*, Dokumenta, Vol. 2, Belgrade 1986, p.1047.

<sup>13</sup> Marica Žabek was probably 35 years old in 1945. HDA, ZKRZ (Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača), *Guz* - 306, 23. 8. 1945.

<sup>14</sup> HDA, ZKRZ, Zh-306, box 211, 7522-7624, 18. 7. 1945.

<sup>15</sup> "Maja Buždon je bila žena, koja je uvijek imala čizme, uvijek je imala pištolj. Fizički je bila zgodna, ali je bila strašna, jako strašna." Peršić-Molnar, Pava. Interview by Martina Bitunjac. Personal interview. Zagreb, September 2, 2007.

recognition. The former inmate Rozika Sinko described in her testimony after the war:

“Once I saw the Ustaša member Maja order an exhausted comrade to get up. When the woman was too weak and lacked the strength to get up, she strangled her with her hands.”<sup>16</sup>

Buždon participated in the mass murders committed in the night. She frequently got drunk and saw the killings as a competition against her male counterparts. Whoever killed the most people was respected and accepted in this circle of murderers.<sup>17</sup> The individual and mass murders united the Ustaše into a community. The consumption of alcohol was a part of their killing ritual. In 1945, Maja Buždon and her husband, the concentration camp guard Mirko Slišković-Slomić, were arrested and interrogated by the *Yugoslav Army*, they did not deny their murders but confessed to the crimes, just like all the other male and female concentration camp guards. She did not regret her deeds.

In May 1945, Maja Buždon gave the following account of her activities as the commander of the women’s camp in Stara Gradiška:

“I was also involved in mass murders, just like all the other functionaries in the camp mentioned. I can’t remember all of the crimes I committed in detail, but the one I remember the most is my first murder, which I committed on an unknown old woman in the fort of the Stara Gradiška camp. I carried it out by throwing the old woman on the ground and shooting a bullet in her temple.”<sup>18</sup>

Participating in mass murder was something Buždon took for granted. For her it was a job that was to be carried out for personal and ideological convictions, without ever calling it into question. The Yugoslav army in Zagreb liquidated Maja Buždon by hanging.<sup>19</sup>

Nada Šakić<sup>20</sup>, née Tambić-Luburić, another former camp guard and half-sister of the commander of the Ustaša concentration camp, Vjekoslav Luburić, also expressed in retrospect

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<sup>16</sup> “Vidjela sam jednom kako je ustašica Maja naredila jednoj iznemogloj drugarici da se digne a kad se ova od slabosti i iznemoglosti nije mogla pridignuti, zadavila ju je rukama.” Javna Ustanova Spomen-Područje (JUSP) Jasenovac, 745: JSV-bb/08D, Testimony Rozika Sinko.

<sup>17</sup> See the testimony of the concentration camp survivor Lazar Jankov, in: Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*, Vol. 2, p. 986.

<sup>18</sup> „Među ostalim učestvovala sam u masovnom ubijanju, kao i ostali dužnosnici i dužnosnice spomenutog logora. Detaljno se ne bih mogla sjetiti svih zločina koje sam počinila, ali u sjećanju mi je ostalo najbolje prvo ubistvo koje sam izvršila nad nepoznatom staricom u kuli logora Stara Gradiška. Zločin sam izvršila na taj način, što sam staricu povalila na pod i opalila joj metak u sljepoočicu.“ See, Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*, vol. 2, p. 1047.

<sup>19</sup> HDA, ZKRZ, Zh-306, box 211, 18. 6. 1945; Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*, vol. 2, p. 1047.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding the life and the memories of Nada Šakić, see Bitunjac, *Le donne e il movimento ustascia*, pp. 196–205.



that Buždon had been a “faithful Ustaša member” (*vjerna ustašica*), thinking about her readiness to murder for the ideological objectives of the Ustaša state. Šakić grew up in a conservative, anti-Yugoslav and anti-Semitic family. She went to the catholic school of the *Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul* in Zagreb. In the *Independent State of Croatia* she frequented a course for female youth functionaries. Her half-brother was an early supporter of Ustaša movement and she had a very close relationship to him.

According to her own statement, she came to the camp only by chance, when she was seventeen, at the invitation of her half-brother, who didn't want to leave her alone at home when her mother went for a reconvalescence treatment for three months. Nada Šakić continued in her statement that she helped some concentration camp guards by monitoring the women prisoners when the guards were otherwise engaged.<sup>21</sup> This argument shows clearly that she interprets her own position in the concentration camp as merely a recipient of commands.

Nada Šakić admitted that the Ustaše committed murders in the Jasenovac concentration camp. When I asked her why they did this, she replied that it was better to kill the prisoners of war than letting them kill you, because, Šakić continued, it was war.<sup>22</sup> First she explains the killing of innocent people as self-defense by the Ustaše; and second by reversing the status of the concentration camp inmates and referring to them as “prisoners of war” and thus as “combatants” and placing the crimes of the Ustaše in the context of the war. The majority of the inmates were civilians who, with the exception of the partisans, never had an opportunity to defend themselves.

She denied the presence of children in the camp, because she hoped to morally alleviate the atrocities committed by the Ustaše. Although she was careful not to say anything that could harm her personally, she mentioned how she once yelled at a female prisoner because she had gotten pregnant in the camp. Šakić wanted to prevent the woman from going around after her release from the concentration camp and telling everybody that the Ustaše had gotten her pregnant.<sup>23</sup> She worried about the reputation of the Ustaše, but at the same time, this showed that their rapes were known in the camp and that she felt no compassion for these abused women. She also described the condition of the male and female prisoners positively:

“I brought them to church. Every Sunday they went to mass and got better food. They didn't fare badly.”<sup>24</sup>

The concentration camp remained a positive memory for Nada Šakić. Here, she had met her

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<sup>21</sup> Šakić, Nada. Interview by Martina Bitunjac. Personal interview. Zagreb, June 1, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Šakić, Nada. Interview by Martina Bitunjac. Personal interview. Zagreb, July 22, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Šakić, Nada. Interview by Martina Bitunjac. Personal interview. Zagreb, June 20, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Šakić, Nada. Interview by Martina Bitunjac. Personal interview. Zagreb, June 1, 2009.

future husband, the former commander Dinko Šakić. Shortly after the war, the couple fled to Italy and later to Argentina. They remained there until 1998, when they were extradited for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Croatia. While Dinko Šakić was sentenced to 20 years in prison a year later, there was no trial for his wife because of an alleged lack of evidence. The Croatian justice originally suspected her of having committed crimes against humanity and war crimes. Among the crimes she was accused of were the torturing of camp inmates to death with other guards, the locking up of inmates in solitary cells without food and water and the participation in selections which resulted in the murder of children, the sick and the frail.<sup>25</sup> One witness, six years old at the time, accused her of murdering two women.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the burden of proof was apparently insufficient to press charges against Šakić for having committed a crime; she was never put on trial. The decision not to hold Nada Šakić responsible was in part made because her depiction that she “just coincidentally” wound up in the concentration camp and did not work there as a guard was accepted as fact. Did the stereotypical image of a harmless, peaceful woman play a role in the evaluation of the crimes as it did in the trials against former concentration camp guards in post-war Germany<sup>27</sup>? It can safely be assumed so.<sup>28</sup>

The case examples of violent women in the Ustaša movement shows that the desire for exercising violence and power was not just in the domain of men, but also some Ustaša women. They differentiated themselves in no way from their male colleagues in their willingness to torture and kill. From the perspective of the strongly patriarchal society of that time, it was incomprehensible to many that women could be just as fanatic as men and use violence out of peer pressure or their own convictions.

On the one hand the concentration camp staff had the legal legitimization to kill and was following orders “from above”; on the other they acted as fanatic executioners deciding between life and death. They considered the concentration camp inmates to be enemies of the state; according to their needs the inmates were either useful workers or a burden to be dispatched with quickly. Convinced that they had served the country, neither the concentration camp staff convicted shortly after the war, nor the former guard Nada Šakić decades later

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<sup>25</sup> Muzej Žrtava Genocida. Suđenje Dinku i Nadi Šakić, box 4, 28. 7. 1998.

<sup>26</sup> “Logorska ‘gošća’ u ustaškoj odori”, in: Večernji list 7.11.1998, p. 30; Vlaši, Boris, “Slučaj Nade Šakić: Osvrt na odluku Državnog odvjetništva. Je li istraga protiv Nade Šakić bilo samo obično odrađivanje procedure?”, in: Jutarnji list, 13. 3. 1999, see: <http://www.monitor.hr/jutarnji/1999-03/13/nsakic.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Weckel, Ulrike/Wolfrum, Edgar, ‘Bestien’ und ‘Befehlsempfänger’. Frauen und Männer in NS-Prozessen nach 1945, Göttingen 2003.

<sup>28</sup> In 2011, Serbia issued a renewed warrant for her arrest and initiated an investigation, not knowing that she had died in Zagreb in February of the same year: “Srbija raspisala tjeralicu za Nadom Šakić koja je preminula u veljači ove godine”, in: Jutarnji list 15. 07. 2011, see: <http://www.jutarnji.hr/nada-sakic-je-umrla-ove-godine--ali-interpol-srbije-raspisao-tjeralicu-za-njom/959535/>.

demonstrated any kind of feeling of guilt, let alone regret.



Nada Šakić and Maja Buždon

# Musealisation (following) World War II in Yugoslavia

Nataša Jagdhuhn

Museology that is neither democratic, nor supporting the regime<sup>29</sup>

"The Ministry of Education of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia is authorised to attend to the storing, safekeeping and distribution of books, archive and museal objects, artistic paintings and busts, science collections, musical objects and all other objects of historical, scientific or artistic significance that became state property as determined by the AVNOJ [the Anti-fascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia] decision of 21 November 1944."

(The Act on Collection of Books and other Cultural-Scientific and Art Artefacts. *Official Gazette of DFJ* No. 36, 29 Nov. 1945)

The relationship of the new government towards heritage is reflected in the fact that "one of the first regulations in the postwar situation was a law on the protection of monuments of cultural and natural value."<sup>30</sup> The reconstruction of the ruined country, as well as building Socialism, implied the revitalization of war-damaged cultural institutions,<sup>31</sup> opening new museums and

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29 As the title itself suggests, this text addresses the emergence, interrelations and roots of the museum network in Yugoslavia, while more thoroughly examining the scientific, educational and social role played in the musealisation of World War II in Yugoslavia by the two most significant types of museums: the *PLW Museum* and the *Revolution Museum*. The topic, broadly framed through the lens of the "Yugoslavisation of museums" or the "musealisation of Yugoslavia," revolves around the question: How did the process of building Socialism in Yugoslavia influence the creation of a "museal language"? Due to the format of the paper, the musealisation of the Holocaust has been omitted from the study. The state name of Yugoslavia pertains exclusively to the Socialist Yugoslavian period stretching from 1945 to 1991.

30 Kumović, Mladenko, *Muzeološko obrazovanje u Finskoj, Češkoj Republici i Srbiji i Crnoj Gori* [Museological education in Finland, the Czech Republic, and Serbia and Montenegro]. Novi Sad: Muzej Vojvodine, 2004 pp. 79-92.

31 The Commissions for Establishing Damage to Cultural Goods were created by the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia decision of 19 December 1944, and tasked with establishing the degree of war damage the occupying forces inflicted on cultural institutions. See: Otašević, Dušan, "Memorijalni muzeji najnovije istorije" [Memorial museums of recent history]. Doctoral dissertation, Edvard Kardelj University in Ljubljana, 1988, p. 33. According to Đorđe Mano Zisi, the war damage commissions whose remit encompassed museums, private collections and monuments would draft commission reports. There had been formal reparations claims, but they did not bear fruit. See: Mano Zisi, Đorđe "Muzeji i zbirke u Jugoslaviji" [Museums and collections in Yugoslavia], in *Muzeji Jugosavije* [The Museums of Yugoslavia]. Belgrade: Savez muzejskih društava

reforming the existing ones. For these reasons, the network of museums blossomed, both in terms of territory, and in terms of quality.<sup>32</sup> In postwar circumstances, when the institution of the museum becomes a catalyst of social change, specifying the role of museums in society<sup>33</sup> becomes a task that cannot be deferred. The introductory text to the first issue of the specialist journal *Muzeji*<sup>34</sup> – published in early 1948<sup>35</sup> – bears the title "The mission of the museum in the new social circumstances in our country." In it, Nada Andrejević-Kun proposes guidelines for museological development, that is, explains the function of museums as "interpreters of culture and social history, whose educational role in society is no different than that of schools, since museums have at their disposal special facilities and means for wide-ranging cultural propaganda, popularizing the national culture and its monumental works and popularizing and bringing them to the masses."<sup>36</sup> The social mission of Yugoslavian museums was reflected in the development of the Socialist culture, primarily through activities related to exhibitions presenting the national cultural heritage to the public, using the methods of scientific

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Jugoslavije, 1962, pp. 9-31.

32 Following liberation in 1945, there were 87 museums in Yugoslavia. Five years later (in 1950), this number had increased to 163 museums; by 1955 it was 267; in 1960, 275; and by late 1964 it had risen to 326. See: Andrejević Kun, Nada "Dvadesetogodišnji razvoj muzeja u Jugoslaviji" [Twenty years of development of museums in Yugoslavia], *Muzeji* [Museums] (18). Belgrade, 1965, p. 17. It is worth remembering that the so-called museum boom (the blossoming of the museum network (only) took place from the early 70s and lasted until the mid-80s, when the most impressive memorial complexes such as *Sutjeska*, *Kozara*, *Petrova Gora*, *Kadinjača* and others were built.

33 During 1948, 1949 and 1950, *Museum workers' societies* were established in the Republics, charged with addressing theoretical and practical issues faced by the profession, and with fostering knowledge exchange among museum workers. In 1952, these societies gathered into the *Union of museum societies of Yugoslavia*, which had the following duties: 1) to coordinate and develop museum societies; 2) to put forward and help resolve questions concerning contemporary museology, with which in view it was to organise expert meetings and consultations; 3) to attend to addressing class issues in a suitable manner and, with this in view to cooperate with national government bodies and the labour union; 4) to keep records on and document museum institutions and personnel, with the aim of monitoring these institutions' and their experts' activities and development; 5) to publish the *Muzeji* [Museums] journal, which will address issues from the specialist field of museology that are of broader concern, and publish the most significant results that arise from the museums' work; 6) to establish and develop links with foreign organisations with the aim of sharing experiences, experts and similar. The *Museum week*, which has been taking place annually since 1954, is among the most important actions organised by the Union. It was also globally the first organised *Museum week*. See: Mano Zisi, Đorđe, "Muzeji i zbirke u Jugoslaviji," in *Muzeji Jugoslavije*. Belgrade: Savez muzejskih društava Jugoslavije, 1962, pp. 9-31.

34 The specialist journal *Muzeji* was the official publication of the Union of museum and conservation societies, at first of Serbia, and later of Yugoslavia as well. It was intended primarily for museum workers, that is, for the development of museal theory and practice in the new socio-political circumstances.

35 Soon after, specialist journals will likewise appear in other Republics: in Zagreb – *Vijesti muzealaca i konzervatora* [Museum workers' and conservation workers' gazette] and in Skopje – *Vesnik na Muzejsko i konzervatorsko društvo NR Makedonija* [Journal of the Museum and conservation society of PR Macedonia], followed by the specialist-scientific magazine *Muzeologija*, *Informatica Museologica* from Zagreb. With time, the growing need for sharing experiences, conceptions and thinking among museum workers will be felt more and more, and the museums, especially the *Museums of the Revolution*, will develop publishing activities, which will result in the emergence of various kinds of collections of essays (i.e. *Zbornik krajiških Muzeja*, *Zbornik Vojnog Muzeja*, *Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije*, *Zbornik Muzeja Revolucije Bosne i Hercegovine* etc.)

36 Andrejević Kun, Nada, "Zadaci muzeja u novim društvenim uslovima u našoj zemlji" [The duties of museums in the new social circumstances in our country]. *Muzeji* (1). Belgrade, 1948, pp. 1-4.

Marxism.<sup>37</sup> As can be inferred from the earliest publications – discourse wherein the museum figures as an authoritative social instrument – the activity of museums in the spheres of ideas and politics in Yugoslavia was never hidden from view. Indeed, museums were characterised as an "important lever in the broad process of national enlightenment".<sup>38</sup> There was a special emphasis placed on the educational role of museums as the "meeting-point for a young audience",<sup>39</sup> which is learning patriotism from the relics of revolutionary struggle. School visits to museums were an obligatory element of teaching curricula.<sup>40</sup> Curricula aimed at young people were thoroughly developed as an apparatus,<sup>41</sup> "as mass agitation is precisely what is crucial to the political mission of museums."<sup>42</sup> Seen as mediators, that is, transmitters of messages from the past into the present (as a future past), historical and memorial museums mirrored as well as built the "founding myth of Yugoslavia"<sup>43</sup> along the following ideological lines:

a. The Peoples' Liberation Struggle and the brotherhood and unity forged in it – the *Genius*

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37 See: Hasanagić, Edib, "Muzeji kao faktor socijalističke kulture" [Museums as a factor of socialist culture]. In: *Zbornik X kongresa SDMRJ* [Anthology of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union of Museum Workers' Societies of Yugoslavia]. Cetinje: Union of Museum Workers' Societies of Yugoslavia, 1984, pp. 87-93.

38 Kumović, Mladenko, *Muzeološko obrazovanje u Finskoj, Češkoj Republici i Srbiji i Crnoj Gori*. Novi Sad: Muzej Vojvodine, 2004, pp. 79-92.

39 On the role of museums in Yugoslavia and their strategies for attracting younger audiences, see: Čejva, Idriz, *Tradicija NOR-a i revolucije i uloga muzeja revolucije u negovanju revolucionarnih tradicija*. [The Tradition of the PLW and the revolution, and the role of museums of the Revolution in fostering revolutionary traditions], Belgrade, 1972, pp. 1-16.

40 Schools enter into partnership with museums. School visits to museums develop sophisticated mechanisms of learning through "images" and "happenings". And not only did schools visit museums, but museums likewise paraded around schools (just like they also paid visits to factories). The mobility and flexibility of the institutions that were museums was reflected in giving young people opportunities to "have their voice heard" (through exhibitions, recitals etc.) in museums. In order to describe the structure of visitors to the museums, Idriz Čejvan will conduct a survey in the Military Museum in Belgrade in 1965, at the time the most-visited museal institution, with a daily average of 520 visitors. He obtained the following data: "In 1965, the total number of visitors was 146,911, of which 90,000 were young people (children, primary and secondary pupils, soldiers). See: Čejva, Idriz, *Tradicija NOR-a i revolucije i uloga muzeja revolucije u negovanju revolucionarnih tradicija*. Belgrade, 1972, pp. 1-16.

41 Various political academies for pioneers and youth were organised in museums (lecture cycles, encounters with PLW participants, showings of documentary and feature films and discussions, quiz contests, summer schools and camps for young people ("school hours" in historical sites) etc.). The forms of museums' education work here listed were mainly organised to mark significant anniversaries of the PLW. Also interesting is the example of museal "required reading", as the Museum of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the AVNOJ would term gramophone records containing recordings of speeches of council members from the historical session, which it had produced during the 60ies to supplement teaching equipment for schools. See: Vojinović, Pero, *Jajce Grad Muzej revolucije* [The City of Jajce Museum of the Revolution]. Sarajevo: Oslobođenje (year of publication not noted).

42 Dušan Kojović has written about the subject-matter orientations of forms of presentation in museums, on the intermediary role of the historical image in the museum as an "inter-element" between the museum collection and the visitor. See: Kojović, Dušan, "Muzeji revolucije kao muzeji najnovije istorije" [Museums of the revolution as museums of recent history]. Doctoral dissertation. Univerza Edvarda Kardelja v Ljubljani, 1983, p. 85.

43 Höpken, Wolfgang, "Between memory politics and mourning. Remembering World War II in Yugoslavia". In: *Bad memories. Sites, symbols and narrations of the wars in the Balkans*. Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, 2008, pp. 27-33. Contributions to the Conference "Bad Memories," held in Rovereto on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Also issued as an e-publication on the website <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/%20Our-products/Bad-memories-75492>. Page last accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2015.

*loci* of museal concepts – the master narrative;

b. Universal Anti-fascist values (internationalism and tolerance with respect to "Others"<sup>44</sup> – the educational role;<sup>45</sup>

c. Revolution with the Communist Party at the helm and the history of the workers' movement (which later came to be the main bearer of the idea of self-management, as a Yugoslav "invention") – museums as sites of political education.

Accordingly, museum workers' edification in terms of ideology as well as skill was presupposed. It was said: "how is someone who has no knowledge of, for instance, dialectical materialism, going to work in a historical museum?"<sup>46</sup> It was emphasised in professional circles that the newly adopted museological approach has to be implemented in opposition to so-called *bourgeois museology*, which referred to the contrast between the conceptions of "museums as temples", elite institutions, and "museums as schools".<sup>47</sup> The symbols of Yugoslavianism were most thoroughly constructed and represented in two types of historial (and memorial) museums that were created to serve this purpose:

- *Museums of the Revolution* – as museums of (the ideas of) Socialism
- *PLW museums* – as museums dedicated to World War II

The said museums' collections developed under the wing of the Party.<sup>48</sup> The Veterans' Association took upon itself the responsibility of collecting objects from the People's Liberation

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44 The emancipatory force of the Anti-fascist movement in Yugoslavia tended towards a high level of tolerance with respect to the sensitive issues of gender, national and religious identities. Nevertheless, it has to be said without further ado that there was little understanding for political differences, which is why museums, like other Yugoslavian cultural institutions are understandably described as instruments of state ideology.

45 Political education began at the age of eight, by taking the pioneers' oath. Analysing a segment of the oath, it is easy to establish its tone of universalist ethics: "P – pošten [honest]. I – iskren [sincere]. O – odan [loyal]. N – napredan [progressive]. I – istrajan [steadfast]. R – radan [diligent]. Comrades pioneers, i congratulate you on becoming good people! Z-D-R-A-V-O!\* ZDRAVO, ZDRAVO, ZDRAVO!" The ritual marking the luminescent moment in the political life of the individual, "becoming a comrade, that is, a pioneer," took place in schools or museums. Thus for instance, children from Sarajevo will receive their pioneers' caps and scarves on the platform of the Museum of the Revolution of BH.

\*A standard form of greeting, wishing the recipient good health.

46 Đurić, Vojislav, "Uloga muzeja i muzejskih radnika u našoj zemlji" [The role of museums and museum workers in our country]. *Muzeji* (II). Belgrade, 1949, pp. 3-8.

47 Museum as a school was a slogan characteristic of the Soviet museology, which was adopted and implemented in the jargon of the Yugoslavian museological matrix with great enthusiasm. It was known to happen that these two institutions "blend" into one, as seen in the example of the Memorial museum "Lipa pamti" [Lime-tree remembers], where the building was divided into two parts. On the ground floor, the museum's curator Danica Maljevac led an after-school programme and a day nursery, while the upper floor housed the Memorial museum "Lipa pamti" (1968-1989), whose opening was initiated by the local council, SUBNOR [Association of the veterans of the PLW] and the Opatija municipality, and which was curated by the same person. I interviewed Danica Maljević in October 2015.

48 "The first collections of material are under the protection of the Party", writes Branka Milošević, "they were gathered and kept by social-political organisations, the Veterans' Association, military units, enthusiasts on the ground." See: Milošević, Branka, "Prezentacija muzeja radničkog pokreta sa osvrtom na prezentaciju socijalističke izgradnje" [Presenting museums of the workers' movement, with a perspective on the presentation of the socialist construction]. *Museology* (17), Zagreb 1975, pp. 73-88.

War. Task forces such as the *Commission to mark historical sites from the PLW*, or the *Commission for fostering revolutionary traditions* were formed, and given the responsibility over legislative activities in the sphere of museum services. As soon as the war ended, in 1945, *National Liberation Museums* emerge, later to "mature" into *Museums of the Revolution*.<sup>49</sup> The official politics of remembrance was constituted along two identity axes: the People's Liberation War and the Socialist revolution. Consequent to this kind of thinking, the role of the museum has separated into two strands. The *Museums of the Revolution* are given a longer period of time on which to focus: the history of the workers' movement (1878-1941), the People's Liberation War (1941-1945) and the development of the Socialist self-management system (the period following 1945). The PLW Museums, meanwhile, were to specialise in World War II itself, that is, its most significant "moments". *Museums of the Revolution* focus on the present day<sup>50</sup> - on the idea, and are thus conceptual in nature, while *PLW museums* are focused on the past – on the document – that is, theirs is a more traditional museological profile. Accordingly, the subject-matter and exhibition layouts for a *Museum of the Revolution* will be dominated by "installations" (slides, artistic interventions, photographs...),<sup>51</sup> while *museums of the PLW* will have the gravitas of a historical site, that is, endeavour to evoke it in as authentic a manner possible, shifting "valleys onto scenes".<sup>52</sup> Hence the name, historical-memorial, or

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49 *Muzej ljudske revolucije* [People's Revolution Museum] of Slovenia was established in 1948, initially under the name of *Muzej narodne osvoboditve* [People's Liberation Museum]; *Muzej revolucije naroda Hrvatske* [Museum of the Croatian People's Revolution] was established in 1945; *Muzej narodne revolucije Split* in 1957; *Muzej revolucije Bosne i Hercegovine* was first established as *Muzej narodnog oslobođenja* [Museum of the People's Liberation] in 1945, etc.

50 The musealisation of the idea (the revolution) presupposes a high degree of flexibility and contemporariness when it comes to museum activities related both to collection-building and exhibiting. Veselinka Kastratović Ristić writes about the creation of the *Muzej Revolucije naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije* [Museum of the Revolution of the peoples and national minorities of Yugoslavia]: "A lack of material heritage to represent the emergence and history of the workers' movement presented a challenge to the founders, as political thought, rather than an object, was the fulcrum of the coming exhibition." See: Kastratović Ristić, Veselinka, "Nastajanje i nestajanje jednog muzeja" [The creation and disappearance of a museum]. In: *Muzeji kao mesta pomirenja* [Museums as sites of reconciliation]. Belgrade, Istorijski muzej Srbije, 2008, pp. 326-340. Zbyněk Zbyslav Stránský writes about the collecting activity of the Museums of the Revolution, calling them pioneers of the progressive orientation, as they "most explicitly implement the demand of the dialectical linking of the past and present, which in museological terms means that the activity of collecting, oriented towards the past, must simultaneously be connected to the collecting activity oriented towards the present, which is why it is precisely in these museums that the question of the relationship between science and the museum is given salience." See: Stránský, Zbyněk Zbyslav, "Nauka u Muzejima revolucije" [Science in Museums of the revolution]. In: *Zbornik radova VIII*, Sarajevo: Muzej revolucije Bosne i Hercegovine, 1984, pp 9-33.

51 Analysing the nomenclature of the display material of the collection of the Museum of the revolution of peoples and national minorities of Yugoslavia, Dušan Otašević establishes that the number of three-dimensional objects is very small, only 6% of the overall number of exhibits. See: Otašević, Dušan, "Memorijalni Muzeji najnovije istorije". Doctoral dissertation. Univerza Edvarda Kardelja v Ljubljani, 1988, p. 129.

52 I borrow the metaphor, "landscape as a stage", as used in the context of memorial parks, from the essay, "Partisan Memorials: Hybrid Memorial Architecture and Object of Revolutionary Aesthetics". See: Burghart, Robert and Gal Kirn, "Partisan Memorials: Hybrid Memorial Architecture and Object of Revolutionary Aesthetics". In: *Signal (03)*. Oakland: PM Press, 2014, pp 98-132. The text is also available online; [http://rb.fzz.cc/pdf/Burghardt\\_Kirn\\_s.pdf](http://rb.fzz.cc/pdf/Burghardt_Kirn_s.pdf). Page last accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2015.



just memorial museums, while *Museums of the Revolution* remain strictly historical, built along the "political-territorial" key (one or more<sup>53</sup> representatives in each republic and province, as well as, naturally, the federal one – *Muzej revolucije naroda i narodnosti* in Belgrade). It can be concluded that these two types of museums have mutually defined their characters, and analysing the institutional forms within which their histories have intermeshed allows the tracing of the genealogy of museological discourse in Yugoslavia. For understanding the origin of the *Museum of the PLW* as a "social technology", another museum type that is widespread in Yugoslavia is important – the *local heritage museum*. Such museums' PLW-related collections very frequently functioned as a precursor to individual memorials, memorial rooms, memorial exhibitions. That is to say, there were two types of museums in FPRY: those specialising in material from a single field of natural or social sciences, and those that collected various materials, whose work and functioning were not precisely defined, and which were challenged as such.<sup>54</sup> They were often called local, or municipal museums, and in the period of the development of Socialism the idea emerged of redefining them as *local heritage museums*, such as, for instance, *Museum of Vojvodina* or *Museum of the Croatian Primorje region*. Building museums with a territorial focus was also aimed at achieving balance between articulating Yugoslavianism and the specificities of ethnic and religious groups. The structure of local heritage museums was based on four basic subject-matters: nature, history, the local PLW<sup>55</sup> and Socialist construction. Thus was the approach these museums took universalist,

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53 There were as many as 7 specialised *Museums of the Revolution* in Croatia, in Makarska, Pula, Rijeka, Slavonki Brod, Split and Zagreb.

54 In 1949, the project of *Reorganising the existing types and establishing new museums in Yugoslavia* was initiated by the Ministry of Science and Culture of the Government of the FPRY. The following questions were considered – as discussed in a conference organised for this purpose on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1949 in Belgrade and published later in a double issue of the *Muzeji* magazine (3-4) – and developed into seven sections: the responsibility and title of a museum; museum collection; thematic structure; basic principles of exhibition layouts; determining the territory; principle of delimiting museum materials; and work organisation. The conference reached the conclusion that, since there are no museums that interpret society through the prism of Marxist-Leninist science, the role of local heritage museums would pose a solution to this problem. Broadly, these museums would have the following tasks: to show the nature of their area, the area's economics, to highlight the development of the society and its ideology. See: "Reorganizacija naših muzeja" [Reorganising our museums], *Muzeji* (3-4), 1949, pp. 1-10 (this text, that is, report, is unsigned). See also: Kumović, Mladenko, *Muzeološko obrazovanje u Finskoj, Češkoj Republici i Srbiji i Crnoj Gori*, Novi Sad: Muzej Vojvodine, 2004, pp. 79-92.

55 Collections related to the People's Liberation Struggle were the most expansive, and frequently grew into standalone museums. Proposals for new museums, or at least new exhibitions – so-called Memorial rooms – which, according to procedure, were submitted to the Commission for marking PLW sites and dates, mostly originated from small local communities, which raced to secure a spot on the "map of PLW remembrances", and since in such communities there was no-one with the competence to lead a complex type of museum, or to attend to the materials, collections, that is, entire exhibition concepts were (mostly) taken over from local heritage museums. In this context, quality was secondary to quantity. In order to allow a better insight into the claims made here, I point to the list of museal and other institutions keeping and presenting material thematically related to the period of the workers' movement, the PLW and the postwar socialist construction, compiled by the *Museum Documentation Centre* from Zagreb, and published in 1986 in the specialist journal *Muzeologija* (26), available online at: [http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=toc&id\\_broj=7667](http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=toc&id_broj=7667).

their exhibitions taking off from a starting point of the relief and geological structure of the local area, continuing by way of its economic and political history in which the development of the classes and class contradictions could clearly be observed, in order for the role of the workers' movement and the significance of the Communist party to the national revolution, which allowed the Socialist construction, the new social order, to be underlined within the topic of people's liberation struggles – as an individual area's manifestation for its liberation. With the emergence of the PLW section, in June 1949, the Central Committee of SUBNOR established the *Committee charged with marking and organising the sites of significant events of the PLW*. Two types of *PLW Museums* are established: those detailing the development of the PLW within the framework of entire Yugoslavia or the Republic, and, in the other category, memorial *PLW Museums* dedicated to individual events or personalities from the PLW. "On the basis of conception, thematic substance, museum collections, exhibition layouts and objects, as well as the activities they perform," three categories of *PLW Museums* would emerge: memorial museums, memorial collections and memorial exhibitions.<sup>56</sup> As these are various "formats" of museums, they frequently fell under the umbrella of the *Museum of the Revolution*. This speaks, on the one hand, of the attempted centralised, controlled development of the museum network, and, on the other, of the necessity of close collaboration, that is, specialist and professional mutual aid. Since memorial museums are for the most part dedicated to single dates (very often these dates were also public holidays), *PLW Museums* also carried the burden of organising commemorative gatherings. Memorial complexes within the framework of national parks, such as *Kozara*, *Sutjeska* and *Kadinjača*, would sometimes play host to hundreds of thousands of visitors in a single day. Likewise, it should be kept in mind that memorial museums were built on historical sites of the PLW, which generally meant that they were rather remote from cities, that is, urbanised areas. Such situation would substantially influence the nature of their relation to the visitors. Heritage and tourism enter a pact<sup>57</sup> that will result in so-called "socialist pilgrimages",<sup>58</sup> the mass nature of which demanded more or less daily offer of

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56 Although in formal terms, the following variations in the names of the institutions themselves appear: memorial museums, memorial houses, memorial rooms, birth houses, memorial exhibitions, memorial parks, memorial complexes. See: Otašević, Dušan, "Memorijalni Muzeji najnovije istorije". Doctoral dissertation. Univerza Edvarda Kardelja v Ljubljani, 1988, p. 104.

57 Soon after the end of World War II, memorial localities of the PLW became sites of pilgrimage and commemorations for many citizens of the SFRY. By mid-70ies, around 2.5 million citizens will have taken part in Partisan marches, excursions and day trips. By the end of the decade, this number will climb to around 4 million visitors a year, and the memorial localities of the PLW become part of SFRY tourism." See the platform: Neprimjereni spomenici [Inappropriate monuments], dealing with memorial tourism in Yugoslavia.

<http://inappropriatemonuments.org/hr/platforma/>

58 I take the term "socialist pilgrimages" from Simina Bădică, who used this term for group visits to museums in Socialist Romania. See: Bădică, Simina, "Curating Communism. A Comparative History of Museological Practices in Post-War (1946-1958) and Post-Communist Romania". Doctoral dissertation. Central

pedagogical content from the museum. Cinemas, theatre scenography, amphitheatres, video and audio booths, speakers' stands and interactive installations were mechanisms with which Yugoslavian historical-memorial museums seduced and guided a broad spectrum of the public, in cities, towns, villages, "through forests and mountains". Exhibiting and interpreting the *relationship* towards the past – not the past itself – as the object of museum subject-matter, was transparently reflected in Yugoslavian-style museums. Pompous speeches on the part of the political elite were a common element of concepts for museums' programmes. Thus, history was not merely shown in museums, it "took place" there. As in "theatres of history", representatives of the highest echelons of the political, scientific and artistic "world" met the people in these museums.<sup>59</sup> Thus, a visit to the museum becomes an experience, and the visitor a spectator, a "witness".<sup>60</sup> Museums thus complement and round their key role of visual communication with performance; that is, they become "ritual sites", in which the central role belongs not to exhibits, but to the visitors, to the actors of "museal reality". Through the gates of the museum, a community took shape, a collective sentiment. Yugoslavian museums displayed, built, and spoke to, the collective. Within this fact resides a critique of monolithic, hermetic and exclusive nature of the "red Anti-fascism"<sup>61</sup> framed in this museal medium, of its lack of sensitivity with regards to the "little man and his story".<sup>62</sup> On the wings of the idea of reconciliation, Yugoslavian museums extolled the accomplishments of the People's Liberation Struggle as the fundamental pillar of the Second Yugoslavia, a "purely emancipatory, rather than an identity-based community, as the anti-fascist struggle itself, rather than some ethnic connection, is the principle which formed the Yugoslavian people."<sup>63</sup>

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European University Budapest, 2013, pp. 165-178.

59 For instance, meetings between pupils and PLW participants were organised in museums, where the latter would recount their memories. On the different aspects of pedagogical work, see: Halupka, Ilona, "Oblici muzejskog pedagoškog rada" [Forms of pedagogical work in museums]. *Spona* (27-28). Novi Sad, 1985, pp. 48-57.

60 I take the "visitor-witness" metaphor from Simina Bădică. See: Bădică, Simina, "Curating Communism. A Comparative History of Museological Practices in Post-War (1946-1958) and Post-Communist Romania". Doctoral dissertation. Central European University Budapest, 2013, pp. 173-178.

61 Beside partisan units, all other military formations that took part in World War II in Yugoslavian territories symbolised collaboration and treason, without exceptions and nuance. This created the dichotomy between "us" and "them", that is, the "right" side (partisans), and, on the other side, the enemy wing of local traitors and foreign occupiers.

62 People's heroes occupied the central place in exhibition spaces, and their "stories" – often accompanied by quotes, but also audio and video files – were personalised, while the voices of other fighters or civilian victims were as a rule marked only with numbers, or a list of names and surnames. Artistic installations were among the strategies of representing mass suffering, for example, the *Museum of the 21<sup>st</sup> October* in Kragujevac, whose exhibition is dominated by the paintings of Petar Lubarda, or the Sutjeska battle Memorial room, utilising the fresco technique (Krsto Hegedušić). On the other hand, there was often a very pronounced empathy for the wounded; hence the musealisation of war hospitals (certainly the most well-known and museologically successful are the examples of the *Partisan hospital Franja* i Slovenija and the *Central partisan hospital* in the *Petrova Gora* Memorial park.

63 See: Buden, Boris, "Zašto smo se ono rastali". *Prelom* 5. Belgrade, 2003, pp 51-58.

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# Peasants and Propaganda in World War II Context

Igor Drvendžija

After the Second world war swept through the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the political arena on the territory of what today constitutes the Republic of Croatia became the battleground between the two political factions which had more or less limited influence on the politics of Yugoslavia in the interwar period, as the Yugoslav politics itself was mainly marked by the opposition between the centralist and federalist bloc. These two “new“ factions were the Communists and the Ustashi. They both tried to win over the hearts and minds of the people, and the most numerous social group was the peasantry. As we shall see in this text, they applied different propaganda tactics which were to a large extent dictated by the political ideology each of them belonged to. But, let us first describe the context of it all.

## **Prewar context**

The Peasant Party (PP) has its beginnings in the times of Austria-Hungarian Empire, when the Party was formed by Antun and Stjepan Radić. Relatively quickly, the Party gained much popularity in the Croat lands of the Empire, so each government, first the Austrian then the Yugoslavian, took it as a threat. As a result, the Party had to change its name several times: Croatian Peasant Party, Croatian People’s Peasant Party, Croatian Republican Peasant Party. The activities of the Peasant Party were from the beginning in discord with the political aims of the monarchy and the Centralists, since Stjepan Radić continually insisted on the federalization of the state. He is even linked to the incident which marked the turning point on the political scene of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; in 1928, he was shot in the parliament in Belgrade and died soon after. Shortly afterwards, the king abolished parliamentarism and imposed dictatorship. Just as all other political parties, PP became illegal, but it continued its activities beyond the law. Vlatko Maček became the head of the Party and, even though he spent some time in prison, he eventually managed to procure the establishment of *Banovina Hrvatska* (Banate of Croatia), a political entity inside the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which roughly encompassed the areas in the Kingdom where the Croats formed the majority. In 1939, Maček became Deputy Prime Minister in the Government, but that was not to last due to a military coup in Belgrade directed against the Government leaning more and more towards

Axis powers. Adolf Hitler reacted by quickly conquering Yugoslavia, as he needed a secure southern flank during the anticipated invasion of the USSR. Even though Vlatko Maček was later imprisoned because of his involvement with the Yugoslav government in exile, the Ustashi profited from Maček's proclamation via radio, in which he called upon all the members of the PP to express support for the newly founded Independent State of Croatia (ISC).<sup>64</sup>

The government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia recognized the Ustashi as a dangerous political entity. Ideologically, the Ustashi emulated the Italian and German fascism with the goal of establishing a totalitarian nationalistic Croatian state. Having their beginnings in the Party of Rights, established by Ante Starčević in the middle of 19th century, the Ustasha movement did not gain any significant political results both up to and after 1929, which is the year when Ante Pavelić (the movement's leader) left the country. Since all political parties became illegal, Pavelić thought that he could do more for his cause if he emigrated and operated from abroad. Once abroad, he established contacts with the Macedonian revolutionary organization VMRO and struck an alliance with its members in order to bring down the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and constitute independent Croatia and independent Macedonia. Because of that, Pavelić was sentenced to death by the Yugoslavian authorities. In 1929, he traveled to Italy and gained Benito Mussolini's support. The name Ustasha was formed in 1932 and, from their base on the island of Lipari in Italy, they have started with the sabotage missions, the most notable of which being the assassination of the Yugoslav king in 1934 in Marseilles. As a result, the Yugoslav government pressured Mussolini, who was forced to impose restrictions on the Ustashi. Their activities lessen right up to Second World War, when Mussolini decides to use them again to achieve his ambitions on the Balkans. After the fall of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Hitler and Mussolini have decided to allow the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>65</sup>

The Communist Party (CP) was declared illegal fairly early during the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the predecessor to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), due to the fear the monarchy harboured towards the consequences of the possible communist uprising. But, before being banned, the CP gained some favourable political results, e.g. in the elections in 1920, when the communists were ranked third according to the numbers of delegates in the Parliament. Already next year, the Government banned the Party by implementing a special law called *Obznana*. Nevertheless, the CP continued its activity and even tried to return to the political mainstream by setting up a sister party which would operate parallel to the now illegal CP, but even that party became banned. After that, the CP began with subversive actions, so

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<sup>64</sup> Matković, *Povijest Hrvatske seljačke stranke*

<sup>65</sup> Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i NDH*

the Government reacted with increasingly restrictive measures. Party leadership was forced to leave the country which consequently reduced its effectiveness. But, in 1936 the Party's central organ in Moscow instructed the Yugoslav party's ruling members to return to the country, after which the Party slowly began to strengthen its position under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. Quickly after the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia, the CP started organizing a resistance against the ISC and its masters, Germany and Italy.<sup>66</sup>

After the war began, the Ustashi collaborated with their masters (nazi Germany and fascist Italy), while the resistance movement, led by the CP, fought against all of them. The Ustashi had their own party armed forces, the Ustashi Militia, but they were also helped by the regular Croat army, the Croatian Home Guard, a situation much like the one in Germany between the SS troops and the Wehrmacht. The Chetniks, nominally a resistance movement of the defeated Kingdom of Yugoslavia, at first cooperated with the partisan forces led by the CP, but quickly changed sides and started collaborating with the Axis powers. Such switching of allegiance, coupled with the fact that the Chetniks, as well as the Ustashi, were committing numerous crimes across the former Yugoslavia, resulted in Yugoslav king in exile renouncing them in 1944 and transferring the legitimacy of the anti-fascist struggle to the partisans.<sup>67</sup>

### **Ustashi and partisan propaganda focusing on peasantry**

Although nominally in control of the territory of ISC, the Ustashi found themselves in a situation in which they were increasingly losing control over the territory, being confined mostly to the bigger settlements and roads. The partisans were slowly strengthening their position in the countryside and were therefore building increasingly stronger ties with the peasantry. It is worth mentioning that the peasantry constituted a majority of the populace<sup>68</sup>, so it is interesting to see how well the belligerent sides were aware of that fact in order to try to win over the peasants by the means of propaganda.

The Ustashi propaganda did not differ much from the German and Italian propaganda: the Ustashi movement was shown as the only real option which can bring prosperity to the Croats, the benevolent importance of the chief of state (Pavelić) was asserted, the importance of the anti-Jew and anti-communist stance was pointed out as well as the besmirching of the Allies who were the enemies of the *New European Order*. The Ustashi do differ from their masters in

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<sup>66</sup> Bogetić, *Hronologija revolucionarne borbe SKJ : 1919-1979*

<sup>67</sup> Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i NDH*

<sup>68</sup> „Neke karakteristike Kraljevine Jugoslavije do Drugog svjetskog rata,“ accessed on December 10, 2015, [http://www.znaci.net/00001/120\\_4.pdf](http://www.znaci.net/00001/120_4.pdf), pages 9-11.



the fact that their version of fascism had an extreme anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav sentiment.<sup>69</sup> The other peculiarity of the Ustashi was that their anti-Jew stance was partially influenced by the need of the Ustashi to ingratiate Hitler, as a certain portion of even the influential Ustashi were either of Jewish origin themselves or had close ties with the Jewish people (Eugen Kvaternik who was one of the Ustashi leaders, the wife of Ante Pavelić etc.).

The Ustashi tried to emulate the political systems in Germany and Italy, but they had much difficulties as a significant portion of the populace did not identify themselves with the Ustashi. Also, people were aware that the ISC was in fact divided into the Italian and German zone of influence, and that a part of the territory was not even under the Ustashi control, but was overrun and held by the partisans.

One of the most important Ustashi propaganda material was the newspaper *Hrvatski narod* (Croatian people). Due to the war circumstances, it was not able to reach all the areas of the ISC, so the Ustashi had to rely on the local newspapers. The Croatian radio system experienced an expansion from only one prewar broadcast station to five in 1941. Regarding the filming propaganda material, the ISC concentrated mainly on the newsreels. As the Axis powers were losing battles on all fronts, they were slowly losing the means of broadcasting their propaganda material, but the ISC remained the last country of the Axis whose broadcasting system was under its own control, propagating victory for the Germany as late as April 1945.<sup>70</sup>

The partisans had an ever greater need to attract the peasantry on their side, as they did not have the advantage of control over the state apparatus, contrary to the Ustashi. Owing to the fact that the partisans were in fact guerillas, they had much larger issues in securing supplies. Therefore, winning over the peasantry was of great significance to them. Together with that, the partisans saw in peasantry a potential for recruitment, as did the Ustashi. Furthermore, it might be speculated that even as early as 1941, the CP had a vision of how the postwar society in Yugoslavia would look like, so it is safe to assume that they started to view the peasantry in such a context.

In some respect, the circumstances of war might have worked in favour of the CP. In such circumstances, the ISC had serious difficulties reaching all the populace living on its territory, and the PP and all the other political options were abolished. Therefore, in the areas held by the partisans, the CP practically had no organized political enemies, so gaining the people's trust had arguably been easier for them than it would have been during peace times when one can find more political options.

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<sup>69</sup> Jareb, „Illusions of a 'Final Victory' and the 'Fate of Small European Nations“

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## Differences in propaganda messages

Clearly, both sides borrowed propaganda materials and techniques from other countries, most notably from their closest allies: the Ustashi from the Nazi Germany and the CP from the USSR. Also, both sides probably understood that the peasants are mostly less educated than the people living in cities, so propaganda materials had to be simple and clear without much written text. That is why both the Ustashi and the partisans found placards useful when addressing peasantry. Although, the leaflets were also of great use to the partisans, since they were not in a position to easily set up placards in the settlements they did not yet liberate. In such conditions, the leaflets were the best replacement for the placard.

Although both sides took into strong consideration the issue of food supply, e.g. through slogans like “Not a single grain to the enemy” (“*Ni zrno žita neprijatelju*”) <sup>71</sup>, it was the partisans who targeted the peasantry more specifically. One can conjecture that Pavelić did not see himself as the leader of the peasants, but as the leader of the Croat nation as a whole, in which the peasantry constitutes only one part. That resulted in the lack of presence of the word “peasant” on the Ustashi placards, as they are usually placed together with the workers. On the other hand, the partisans approached the peasantry individually, pointing out the need for the better literacy among the peasants<sup>72</sup> and stressing the issues typical for the peasantry which were present even through the interwar period.

Both sides used anti-propaganda together with the regular propaganda, where the enemy was characterized as the one who does not care about the plight of the peasants. Owing to the fact that the peasantry is generally a social group which largely preserves its traditions, the Ustashi could count on a strong argument to help them in their propaganda struggle against the communists - religion. In the Ustashi propaganda, the partisans were frequently shown as a godless bunch that tried to prohibit the belief in god. Naturally, the partisans did not have an answer to that, but they used up the matter of gender equality. As in all other fascist regimes, the women were not expected to pursue a career, while in the communist societies they were considered to be equal to males. Consequently, we find very few cases where peasant women are mentioned in the Ustashi propaganda, while the partisans promoted their inclusion to a greater degree.

Furthermore, while the Ustashi pointed out the presence of the Jewish people among the partisans, as the proof of the latter’s malevolence, the partisans indicated the need for cooperation between the threatened groups (Jews, Serbs etc.) in a joined effort against the

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<sup>71</sup> Pavičić, *Hrvatski politički plakat*

<sup>72</sup> Pavičić, *Hrvatski politički plakat*

common enemy, i.e. the Ustashi. Another issue overlooked by the Ustashi was mentioning the matter of collective property, typical for the communist societies. The Ustashi tried to show the collectivization as something negative and as something the peasants should fear from in a communist regime, but they disregarded the fact that a portion of the Croatian peasantry already had a similar experience in a collective mode of life, i.e. in the family collectives (*zadruga*). One might surmise that the memories of life in the family collectives were ones of partnership and joint aid, so the peasants were arguably not as threatened by the collectivization as the Ustashi thought they would be.

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