Master Thesis

Between Strategy and Utopianism: Ethnic Violence and Strategic War In Lika, 1941

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Abstract

This thesis proposes two separate intents lying behind the use of violence: namely, “nationalizing” (Gumz 2001) or utopian ideology, and the strategic desire to control territory. Three hypotheses are formulated on this basis, and applied to the case of Lika in 1941. The first predicts that violence exercised by actors motivated by the first type of intent will become increasingly indiscriminate, and is strongly corroborated in the case of the Ustaše. The second hypothesis, building on Kalyvas’ (2006) model, predicts that the selective or indiscriminate nature of violence executed by actors motivated by the second type of intent will correlate with the actor’s level of control: this is largely corroborated in the case of the Italians, but only partly so in the case of the Partisans. The final hypothesis, combining the arguments of Kalyvas (2006) and Dulić and Hall (2014), predicts a stark contrast in the geographical spread of violence executed by strategic and ideological actors, and is strongly corroborated. The thesis works from a micro-level approach.
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Part One: Introduction, Theory and Method

Chapter One: Theory and Method

Introduction and Research Aims

Few topics are as negatively evocative as the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), often depicted as mired in the inexplicable. However, recent trends in scholarship have increasingly sought to explain the inexplicable, in the fields of Holocaust and Genocide and Peace and Conflict Studies. One acute tension seems to be between those whose research is tailored to exploring ideologically-driven mass violence, that is, when mass violence is a matter of policy in and of itself, as has been observed with extreme forms of nationalism and communism, and on the other hand, those whose research centres on insurgency and counter-insurgency, where mass violence is generally less systematic (though with exceptions), who thus approach analysis of violence from an angle that is broadly more rationalist. What this comes down to is a difference in the intent of the actors that each school focuses on.

Lika in 1941, however, offers a case where both types of theories can be considered in tandem, as actors more of the type considered by both of the respective theoretical poles were present. Regarding the Ustaše, their dispositions and actions place them in the category of those actors who execute mass violence as a matter of policy. On the other hand, the Italian military, regular Croatian military (Domobrani) and the Partisans waged a less violent war whose motivation was political power and/or control of territory, rather than ethnic purification. The fledgling Četnik movement had dispositions not dissimilar to the Ustaše’s but lacked the state apparatus necessary to implement them as systematically, and remained embedded for much of the time-frame considered in uneasy alliance with the Partisans as part of a generalized insurgency.

This thesis aims specifically to consider the relationship between the intent of the perpetrator, and the patterns of violence they execute. Is it indeed true that
strongly ideological worldviews lead to more brutal patterns of violence, as generally assumed? And what should we make of mass killings executed by actors who lack such genocidal intent? The best way to answer these questions is to analyse, compare and contrast patterns of violence as executed by actors with differing intents. In order to theoretically ground such analysis, this will be done through hypotheses that will be formulated in the course of the present discussion of more specific theoretical models for linking beliefs and actions in the cases of ideological or utopian (or what I come to call “nationalizing”) actors, insurgent actors and counterinsurgent actors. Though the main focus is on mass killings and the general killing of civilians, combat is also considered, as is necessary to analyse the extent to which an actor targets innocents.

Disposition

In the following section, I firstly overview previous research on the two families of violence I have observed in Lika, of both historiographical and theoretical natures. In the subsequent theory section I then propose, streamlining the broader theoretical discussion above, two more specific theoretical models by which they can be analysed, formulating on this basis three hypotheses, one specific to each, one a hybrid of both. I also dedicate a brief section to acknowledging limitations of, and the overlapping between, each model, before explaining methodology and source material.

Part Two is dedicated to empirical analysis, broadly proceeding chronologically as is conducive to the logical answering of the Hypotheses. Part Two is divided into chapters and sub-chapters analysing events and periods with specific reference to the Hypotheses, as well as with qualitative analysis expanding on broader significance of particular events and periods. The final section, Concluding Observations, ties together in a succinct manner all theoretical observations and answers to the Hypotheses, with reference back to the following section.
**Previous Research**

As this thesis is related both to the historical study of the NDH and Lika in their own rights, and to the theoretical realm which drives the analysis, a brief overview of literatures concerning both is necessary before moving on to the formulation of hypotheses.

Localized studies with diverse theoretical groundings have been increasingly undertaken for particular areas of the NDH, for example Dulić (2005) on much of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greble (2011) on Sarajevo, and Oenema (2014) on Banija; but not for Lika generally, studies of which to date have been problematic, lacked theoretical base, and/or been limited in locality or actors considered. The trend of specification in analysis of the NDH is not limited to local studies, but also includes detailed studies on particular aspects of the NDH and Ustaše movement, analysis of which has become increasingly nuanced in this century, no longer depicted as dark monoliths. Such examples include: Miljan (2018) on Ustaše Youth; Ademović (2000) and Labus (2014) on the press; Yeomans (2005) on gender and (2015) on Ustaše cinema; Hoare (2014) and Kisić-Kolanović (2015) on Muslims in the NDH; Koljanin (2015) on the role of concentration camps; Bartulin (2014) on racialism; and many more.

The Četniks have also been analysed with sophistication, for example by Tomašević (1975) and Popović, Lolić and Latas (1988), while Četnik mass killings have been explored by Dizdar and Sobolevski (1999) (who also consider war crimes of Partisan-led forces) and Dulić (2005, 102-120, 176-215). Counterinsurgent policies that resulted in mass killings have been considered by Melson (2007), and by Mazower (1992) whose work focuses on Greece but nevertheless adds much to the topic of counterinsurgency in the Balkans. Counterinsurgent mass killings have been directly contrasted with those of the Ustaše by Gumz (2001), Korb (2010) and Dulić (2015b).

However, many of the specific works on violence in Lika have tended to veer towards positions more dogmatic than nuanced. One good example being four anthologies dedicated to local-level studies of municipalities (Zatezalo 1979, 1984, 1985, 1989). The purpose seems to be the translation of the Yugoslav Communist narrative onto the regional level. This reflects a trend that Dulić (2015a) discusses, by which the wartime propaganda of the Partisans became state ideology post-war, in
part due to the transitional justice mechanisms (whose documentation has been one of my sources). This was a process by which discourse around “Brotherhood and Unity” between the peoples of Yugoslavia expanded the hiatus between Ustaše and the true Croat, downplaying the widespread appeal of nationalist sentiments and the fact that most Croats were bystanders rather than Ustaše or Partisans (see Dulić 2015a).

I have found in these and similar works from Communist Yugoslavia that the focus is on fighting, to the detriment of a reckoning with atrocity—similar I would say to immediate post-war Holocaust memory in Israel (see Yablonda 2003; Zerubavel 1994)—and on the Party. Atrocities are sometimes framed with depiction of the victims as political progressives rather than ethnic victims, downplaying sectarian agency, an example of the combination of more general Communist/Marxist tropes with Yugoslav-specific ones.

Serbian nationalist historical discourse is in some ways a perversion of the Yugoslav Communist narrative, in that it maintains a wide hiatus as the starting principle. However, the hiatus is redefined in ethnic terms, between Serbs and Croats. The latter are depicted in a way not dissimilar to Goldhagen’s (1996) depiction of Germans, as pointed out by Dulić (2015a, 252-253), the former as being on par with the Jews (see MacDonald 2002), using the “Holocaust paradigm” (see Huttenbach 1988). Serbian nationalist historiography, as well as generally assigning collective guilt to Croats, which Dulić argues is directly related to the failure of the Communist era to address the middle-role of bystanders (2015a, 252-253), has also tended to depict the Ustaše as religious fanatics, Catholic and Islamist, with little nuance allowed. Such examples include Rapaić (1999) on Lika specifically, Trifković (2010) on the Croatian Serbs, and Avramov’s (1995) ethno-centric definitions of genocide. Besides the problems with the premises of communist and nationalist writings, both share an acute problem regarding modes of analysis: there is little differentiation between killings under different fascist actors or at different times.

It is only in the new millennium that more balanced research on Lika has begun to emerge. Most important are Zatezalo’s later works (2005, 2007), which as well as being no longer constrained by communist doxa are a specific study of atrocity against Croatian Serbs, with specific sections dedicated to Lika, and indeed the second work (2007) being the most substantive work written on the Gospić-1

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1 See, for example, Knežević’s description of events in the village of Ljubovo (in Zatezalo 1979, 277-285).
Velebit-Pag camp system. Vezmar’s (2004) is the closest work to a systematic analytical study of violence in Lika, while S. Goldstein’s short but insightful section is the best English-language description of events in summer 1941 (2013, 151-159). Furthermore, there is Sobolevski’s (1994) research on Četnik atrocities in Lika, and Jareb’s (2011) discussion of war crimes committed during the initial Partisan-led uprising in Lika, not to mention Dizdar and Sobolevski’s (1999) more generalized study of Četnik crimes in which Lika is covered. However, all these writers tend to relate the sequence of events, and even if they do so in a less ideological manner, or with serious insight, a theoretical base of analysis continues to be lacking.

One exception is Bergholz (2010, 2016) on Kulen Vakuf, part of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the border with Lika, which I have nevertheless covered in my analysis. Focused on a massacre committed by Partisan-led forces against Muslim civilians, memory of which remained suppressed under Communism, his work balances perpetrator- and victim-centred theoretical analysis in assessing the impact of ideology on a small community, arguing that ethnic hatred was the result of external factors rather than the community’s previous internal dynamics (Bergholz 2010, 2016), contributing to the welcome trend of breaking the image of the Balkans as a region of communal hatreds (see Todorova 2009).

Interesting for my purposes is Oenema’s Masters dissertation (2014), adopting Kalyvas’ (2006) two models for violence (selective and indiscriminate), and Dulić and Hall’s (2014) arguments on space, in formulating hypotheses by which to structure analysis of mass violence in Banija, significant not only for the theoretical discourse, but also for the study of the region in clearly differentiating between the patterns of violence as exercised by actors with different motivations, ideological and counterinsurgent respectively. She finds a strongly positive correlation between high levels of indiscriminate violence and the ethnic-ideological predisposition of the Ustaše, in contrast to the comparatively-selective nature of the violence of the strategically-motivated Wehrmacht.

With her theoretical insights in mind, theoretical research should be considered too. Regarding theoretical approaches to ideological mass violence, the category is exemplified on the macro-level by works such as Fein’s (1993) sociological approach, Weitz (2003) on utopianism, Naimark (2002) on the concept of ethnic cleansing, Sémelin (2007) on the psychological deep structure of “othering”
and Bauman (1992) on the trajectory of the modern state, to name just a few. In terms of the patterns of how this is implemented in practice by organized actors, the quintessential rubric remains Hilberg’s (1985) “three-step model” of definition, concentration, and destruction. However, this is tailored specifically to the highly centralized Holocaust: Mann (2005) constructs a more nuanced theory of progression from forms of pressured assimilation all the way to genocide, while most importantly for my purposes, Dulić (2005, 2015b) has specifically adopted these and similar theoretical dispositions to the specific case of the Ustaše and their patterns of violence, as will be considered in the following section.

Theories on insurgent-counterinsurgent conflict, on the other hand, tend to be tailored to less totalizing forms of violence and therefore tend to downplay arguments on mass attachments, and instead view the use of violence, ethnic and non-ethnic, as reflecting more tangible logics. Fearon and Laitin (2003) in particular have seriously questioned the role of ethnic attachment, prioritizing environment and incentive. However, in terms of arguments on the specific patterns of violence in wars between insurgents and incumbents, Kalyvas’ (2006) theory is the strongest, postulating that there is a clear logic to what form of violence—selective or indiscriminate—is used, namely that it depends on the level of control. His theory postulates that insurgent and counterinsurgent actors use violence cautiously: other scholars disagree, such as Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay (2004) who argue that mass killings are a likely counterinsurgent strategy in irregular war, and Lyall who upholds this argument in the case of Chechnya, not to mention scholars such as Mazower (1992), Gumz (2001) and Dulić (2015b) who discuss mass killings, even if non-ethnic, as a policy of the Wehrmacht in the Balkans.

There is overlap in analysis, however. Mazower (2002) in a general historical discussion, and Dulić and Hall (2015) and Dulić (2015b) when specifically discussing the NDH, have made room for both predispositions in broadly arguing for consideration of the immediate context of violence, and more importantly for my purposes, the intent of the perpetrator.

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2 For a fuller overview of “rational choice” positions on ethnic conflict, see Kaufmann (2005).
Theory and Hypotheses

In the field of theoretical approaches to mass violence, there are thus diverse angles that reflect not only diverse academic predispositions, but also the empirical reality that mass violence is not a uniform phenomenon.

The contrast most applicable to my topic is drawn out by Gumz (2001), who formulates a direct contrast between two types of violence in the NDH. Firstly, there is what he calls the “nationalizing war” of the Ustaše: an umbrella term for diverse types of ethnic violence against minorities executed in relation to the Ustaše ideology of “ethnic purity”, an ideological predisposition that is also referred to as “utopianism” (Midlarsky 2005, 74-76; cf. Weitz 2003), which in being sufficiently wide allows us to speak of one ideological family of actions while avoiding the question of specific definitions (such as ethnic cleansing, genocide, etc.), beyond the scope of this thesis. I define as part of “nationalizing war” any revolutionary policy implemented using violence (lethal and non-lethal) aimed at changing the demographic structure to the advantage of the perpetrating group, and to the disadvantage of a defined other.

This builds on Hilberg’s (1985) paradigm, adapted to the NDH by Dulić (2005), that utopian-based persecution builds on “definition by decree”. I propose Kelman’s (1973) rubric, sanctioned massacre, as a good umbrella term for when “nationalizing” violence is lethal in form, “nationalizing violence” necessitating policy and ergo what Fein (1993) refers to as positive sanctioning. Secondly, there is counter-insurgent warfare of the German (and Italian) occupiers, and regular Croatian Army (Domobrani)—counter-insurgent warfare depending on the presence of insurgents.

These three—“nationalizing warfare”, insurgent warfare, and counterinsurgent warfare—are the contexts in which violence against civilians happened in Lika in 1941, executed by the Ustaše, Partisans and Italians and Domobrani, respectively, with the Četniks in a grey zone between insurgency and “nationalizing” war. However, more specific theoretical models need to be explored. My exploration will necessarily be reduced to theories explicitly dealing with these three types of warfare, and focusing on the theoretical explanations of why civilians are killed.

On the general question of mass killings, a good theoretical rubric on which to begin is Dulić’s, who argues that there are three dimensions of mass killings, namely
intent (how much of the target group the perpetrator intends to kill), systematics (how systematic and encompassing [including regarding gender and age] the ethnic mass killings are) and magnitude (what proportion is actually killed) (2005, 11-24). Intent can be subdivided into none, selective killing and total/substantial; systematics into incidental, sporadic, continuous and institutionalized; and magnitude into low, intermediate and substantial/total (Dulić 2005, 11-24). I intend to analyse the relation between intent and practice, rather than result, ergo I will not consider the third dimension, magnitude, only the first two. Besides my greater interest in the latter two, I also lack the necessary population data for conclusions on magnitude; I also wish to avoid the discussion of definitions, in this case being localized, opening issues beyond my scope.

So, with Gumz’s (2001) division in mind, we can postulate there are two potential intents: the intent to cause damage to a defined group as such, through policies aimed at changing the population structure to the advantage of the perpetrating group (i.e., “nationalizing war”); and none, that is, no clear intent to change the population structure, merely to seek to control territory, gain political power, and the like (strategic war). Analysis of the former “nationalizing” intent will necessarily require qualitative discussion, where appropriate, of specific macro-policies that contextualize local violence. Gumz’s contrast is very similar to that drawn out by Scianna (2012) in his contrast between Austrian counterinsurgent atrocities and Bulgarian “nationalizing” type violence in occupied Serbia in 1914-1918.

The contrast between the two intents and their respective patterns of violence—systematics—has been drawn out already. Dulić (2013) argues that with an actor motivated by the desire to control territory, levels of violence will decrease with increasing levels of control, as violence is used indiscriminately by such actors only as a means to achieve control; and in contrast to “nationalizing ideology”, generally modern (cf. Bauman 1992; Mazower 2002), it is more typical of the pre- and early-modern periods (cf. Mann 2005, 34-54). Dulić has also explicitly drawn out the contrast in intent between mass killings committed by the Ustaše on one hand, and regular armed forces (Wehrmacht and Domobrani) on the other: “the Germans sought to achieve control over population and space rather than achieving the complete
remoulding of society pursued by the Ustaše” (2015b, 157)\textsuperscript{1}. The extension of this contrast to the Italians, whom as my empirical analysis will show were considerably less violent than their German counterparts (killing 100 civilians for every soldier lost [Gumz 2001; cf. Mazower 1992]), is one lacuna I am exploring.

Moving to systematics, Dulić (2015b) makes strong arguments on the patterns of killings of actors motivated by these two intents. Essentially he argues that the victims of the Ustaše regime, an actor motivated by “nationalizing” ideology, included a much higher proportion of women, hence that their massacres were gender-neutral, and a much higher proportion of children and elderly, hence age-neutral, ergo foregoing any possibility that this was in any way a selective response to actual, or pre-emption of potential, insurgency. Regarding the same question on strategic actors with non-nationalizing intent, such as the Italians and Partisans, victims then will be more gendered and more limited in age group, i.e., a much higher proportion of military aged-men will be targeted (Dulić 2015b).

In his study of the progression of Ustaše mass killings of Serbs specifically, Dulić has also found some statistical confirmation of the argument that Ustaše mass killings moved from what I call “decapitation”—the attempt to damage the Serb community through the killing of its (mostly male) local elites—to more generalized killings (2005, 303-310). Furthermore, the idea of moving from gendered “decapitation”, a form of more targeted ethnic violence, to increasingly de-gendered and age-neutral killings, or more simply completely indiscriminate killings, is an argument that has frequently been made about the Ustaše (see S. Goldstein 2013; Jelić-Butić 1977; Koljanin 2015). This can be surmised as a progression from what Dulić calls the intent of selective killing to that of substantial or total.

On the question of systematics, concurrent with the progression of victims described in the previous paragraph, one would therefore expect to generally see a progression from sporadic killings to a pattern of continuous killings, and finally to an institutional level involving a high degree of organization, what Dulić also refers to as the atomisation of the destruction process (that is, the involvement of multiple bodies and processes in the organized project of “nationalizing violence”) (2005, 33-34; cf. Hilberg 1985). Ergo, my Hypothesis One is as follows:

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\textsuperscript{1}This quote refers to German views on Croat-Serb relations: when it concerned Jews, the Germans of course did pursue the remoulding of society.
**H1**: When an actor following a program of *nationalizing war* is in control, mass killings will become *increasingly* indiscriminate moving from gendered “decapitation” to larger and completely indiscriminate killings, and from *sporadic* to *institutionalized* levels.

H1 is related mainly to the *temporal* aspect. The other aspect of key importance is the *spatial* aspect. When it comes to space, H1, though mainly focused on time, also predicts that space controlled by a nationalizing actor will see increasingly indiscriminate violence against the target group. However, space has more centrality in cases where the actor is motivated by strategic concerns, rather than utopian ethnic ideology: Dulić and Hall argue that spatial patterns are less differentiated with the Ustaše whose vision was ultimately not limited to any one area, but was totalizing: space may have had some salience regarding why certain areas were attacked first (usually Serb majority areas where resistance was more of a tangible threat), but any strategic logic is essentially diluted by the extent to which the patterns of Ustaše attacks soon encompass the Serb population everywhere it is found, and so the ultimate plan of elites must be considered more than any apparent strategic logic (2014).

On the question of insurgent and counter-insurgent violence, where an ethnically-defined *utopianism* is lacking and intent is essentially strategic and *neutral* regarding ethnic structure, ergo more related to space, it is necessary to find a different means by which to explore why civilians are nevertheless killed in the context of this fighting, even if in far fewer numbers. While according to Dulić’s (2005) models these could be classified as *incidental or sporadic massacres*, executed by an actor with purely strategic or political motivations, we need a more in-depth way of analysing why these happen.

Most useful for my purpose is Kalyvas (2006), who does not attempt to explain *nationalizing* war and hence avoids the pitfalls of other rational choice theorists who attempt to do so, as discussed by Kaufmann (2005) and Midlarsky (2005, 64-74), instead addressing why mass killings happen in specific cases of insurgent-counterinsurgent warfare.

Kalyvas postulates that indiscriminate violence is counterproductive if, unlike an actor such as the Ustaše executing “nationalizing” war, an actor’s intent is merely
control of territory or political power, as indiscriminate violence will alienate the population, who will grow to resent the actor in control, and defections to and support for the opposing actor will result—thus in the long run endangering the first actor’s control (2006, 146-172). This is precisely the argument made, for example, by Domobran and German officers against the Ustaše’s indiscriminate violence, which in fuelling ethnic conflict threatened to create a situation where their control of territory, and with it of communication lines and resources, was endangered (Dulić 2015b; Gumz 2001). Therefore Kalyvas’ first hypothesis predicts that a strategic actor, in stark contrast to one waging “nationalizing war”, will move from indiscriminate to selective violence as control is consolidated (2006, 169). Limani found a strong corroboration of this in the case of Kosovo in the Second World War, a case very well suited to Kalyvas’ model given the prevalence of strategic actors (2014).

Kalyvas (2006) formulates a spatial model whereby an area where both the incumbent and the insurgent is present is divided into five zones. Zones 1 and 5 are under the uncontested control of the incumbent and insurgency, respectively; Zones 2 and 4 under the respective control of the incumbent and insurgency, but somewhat contested; and Zone 3 is an area of parity of control (Kalyvas 2006, 202-207). In Zones 1 and 5, incumbent and insurgent violence will respectively be unlikely, because the level of control is high enough to preclude the need, and as defection to the other side is unlikely due the other side’s absence, even selective violence is unnecessary (Kalyvas 2006, 202-204).

Selective violence is essentially a proportional, or at least measured or pre-emptive, response to a tangible threat, and will prefer to target actually or potentially guilty individuals, intended to discourage the population from defection (Kalyvas 2006, 173-209). Selective violence however, according to Kalyvas, will be exercised by the incumbent and insurgent in Zones 2 and 4, respectively, because a tangible threat from the enemy gives a genuine incentive towards its use to actually destroy the enemy and discourage defection, with the desire to avoid causing defection through violence more redundant than in an uncontested control zone as the enemy is already present. Moreover, besides the desire of discouraging would-be defectors, the temptation is real for the still-stronger actor to issue a serious blow to the enemy within the area before they grow stronger (2006, 173-209).
Regarding indiscriminate violence, this will not be due to ideology, rather to information failure: that is, inability to access the information on individuals necessary for selective violence (Kalyvas 2006, 146-149). This, according to Kalyvas, will most likely be observed in areas where the perpetrator lacks control, ergo lacking access to information about the area (2006, 202-204). So, incumbent indiscriminate violence will most likely be observed in an insurgent (Zone 4 or 5) area, insurgent indiscriminate violence in an incumbent (Zone 1 or 2) area.

In Zone 3, a zone of control-parity, Kalyvas predicts no violence, as both sides have leverage over the other through equal access to denunciations, and can each appear attractive to victims if the other side uses violence, hence the equal possibility of defections and denunciations acts as a mutual restraint (2006, 202-204).

Kalyvas’ model is based on the assumption that an actor will only use violence when its benefit (b) outweighs its potential cost (v) (b>v) (2006, 202-204). Potential cost includes provoking defection; benefit includes consolidating control and pre-empting threats to it through neutralization of actual and potential defectors/enemy operatives, including the exemplary warning purpose (Kalyvas 2006, 202-204). This stands in marked contrast to an actor motivated by “nationalizing” or utopian ideology, which H1 predicts will be more likely to use control as a means of implementing revolutionary demographic-changing policies through violence, by definition more indiscriminate as it targets members of a group (of all ages and genders) on that basis alone rather than due to any individual guilt (Dulić 2013; cf. Midlarsky 2005; Weitz 2003).

Therefore, due to the rationalist assumption of Kalyvas’ model, it should be used only for analysis of those actors who are neutral on the question of demographic-ethnic structure, and whose concern is strategic, taking and maintaining control of territory. These actors are the Partisans, Italians and Domobrani, analysis of whose actions using Kalyvas is appropriate as they are insurgent and counter-insurgent actors who maintained control of portions of Lika in 1941. So, Hypothesis Two relates to these actors:

**H2**: When an actor is motivated by strategic concerns, levels of violence will correlate inversely with their extent of control, with indiscriminate violence
executed in areas where they lack control and selective in areas where their control is threatened.

Tying together the arguments on contrasting intents and spatial aspects (part of systematics), Hypothesis Three then formulates the final contrast. As mentioned, Dulić and Hall (2014) argue that with the Ustaše, violence departs from a spatially targeted to a more geographically widespread pattern. On the other hand, when considering strategic actors, it follows that their use of violence will be focused on an area that is of strategic importance: that is, an area in which the benefit of using violence outweighs the potential cost ($b>v$) due to the salience of the area.

**H3**: When an actor waging “nationalizing war” is in control, violence will become increasingly widespread geographically. However, in the context of conflict between actors motivated by strategic concerns, violence (selective and indiscriminate) will correlate with areas of strategic concern to the perpetrating actor.

H3 is essentially the same as one of the hypotheses considered by Oenema (2014), who found confirmation of the two predictions regarding Ustaše and German-Partisan violence in Banija. Whether the pattern holds with the Lika Ustaše and the Italians will thus be considered in this thesis.

**A Theoretical Caveat**

This is a very interesting area theoretically, but with Dulić’s (2015) three dimensions in mind, one should consider that counterinsurgent mass killings—even if intent is neutral regarding the population structure and is limited to control of territory—nevertheless can reach a high level of systematics. This is because, as argued by Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay (2004), it can become a calculated strategy, to destroy the population on which insurgents depend, for example the rural base that Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue is necessary for insurgency, and to terrify the population into submission. Though Kalyvas acknowledges that counterinsurgencies can use such violence as a deterrence method, he still frames it in the light of
information failure (2006, 149-150), which is not the same thing as a continuous, calculated strategy. This perhaps problematizes Kalyvas’ (2006) assumptions that a strategic actor will avoid indiscriminate reprisals unless constrained by information failure, hence unable to retaliate selectively. So, in Dulić’s (2005) terms, even an actor with an intent level of none regarding demographic structure can implement mass killings at a continuous level. This is because indiscriminate violence may be seen as more effective than costly by certain actors, in terrifying populations into submission, essentially reversing the cost-benefit model to warn potential insurgents that the cost of defection will be higher than the gain. For example Lyall (2009) found statistical confirmation of the success of this policy in the case of indiscriminate bombardment in Chechnya, with bombed villages seeing lower levels of defection.

Another shortcoming of the assumption of a cost-benefit model needs consideration. Midlarsky argues that what is considered preferable by an actor may not remain constant as assumed by Kalyvas, as due to what he calls the domain of losses the situation may change remarkably (2005, 64-74, 86-92). Kalyvas himself briefly acknowledges this, as well as the argument that the cost-benefit model does not necessarily define how individuals on the ground think (2006, 207-209). Ergo if an incumbent feels increasingly threatened due to state losses, indiscriminate violence against a minority perceived as a threat may appear more attractive and less costly: creating a demographically secure utopia out of what is left (Midlarsky 2005, 64-74). Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay similarly argue (though without specifically ethnic conflict in mind) that as an incumbent faces losses or inability to defeat a growing insurgency (ergo, the desire to prevent defections now becoming redundant, or having generally failed), mass killing of the population perceived as supporting the insurgency may emerge as a more desirable, effective and even less costly option (as to respond selectively or non-violently may only embolden the insurgent)—“draining the sea” to isolate the fish (2004).

When we are dealing with a region where ethnicity is, to use Mann’s term, the prime axis of social stratification (2005), and where armed actors represent ethnicities, the line between counterinsurgent violence and “nationalizing war” can therefore be blurred. So the intent of controlling territory can nevertheless in certain conditions amount in practice to continuous indiscriminate attacks against an ethnic group. One example discussed by Kiernan (2010) is East Timor, where the level and
indiscriminate nature of Indonesian counter-insurgent violence reached a level that he calls “genocidal counterinsurgency” against a nationally differentiated group. Another case is Guatemala (see Peralta and Beverly, 1980). Furthermore, in the case of the Herero and Nama, the use of “genocidal counterinsurgency” reached levels of institutionalization, even involving camps, and exterminating virtually the entire Herero population (Zimmerer 2010). Moreover, when ethnicity is already acting as the prime axis of stratification, or as Kreidie and Monroe (2002) elegantly put it, a factor constraining choice on an individual level causing a lack of ethnic mobility, it is likely that the level of defection will be considerably lower as individuals will perceive that switching to another ethnic side is not possible: it is dangerous, or indeed blocked by the other side’s in-group criteria.

Alternatively, an actor motivated to begin with by “utopian” or “nationalizing” ideology may be provoked into an intensification of their policy due to the emergence of resistance from the targeted group, using it as a pretext. Examples include, specifically regarding the NDH, Herzegovina as discussed by Dulić (2005, 123-175), or alternatively the case of the Armenians as discussed by Travis (2016)—who argues that the supposed intent of counter-insurgent response to Armenian separatists was, and remains, a means of clouding genocidal intent.

As will be seen, there was some overlap between counter-insurgency and actors waging “nationalizing war” with established intent, as the Ustaše’s policies in Lika were waged both before and after the outbreak of insurgency in late July; likewise, the insurgency had certain elements predisposed towards “nationalizing” ideology. Hence, I have felt that it is necessary to explain this caveat and room for overlap, both in order to acknowledge limitations with the theory used, and to allow for more nuanced theoretical explanations in the empirical analysis—for to attempt to postulate a total dichotomy would be false.

**Methodology and Source Material**

The primary research on which my empirical analysis is based consisted of event coding. In analysing primary source material, using FileMaker Pro software, I coded more than 170 events involving lethal violence in the Lika region in 1941. The codes are now part of the database for the “Microfoundations of Violence—Western
Balkans” project at the Hugo Valentin Centre. Limani (2014) and Oenema (2014) also did the primary research for their dissertations in connection with this project. The codes included “massacre”, “combat”, “collateral victims”, “sexual violence” “mutilation” and so on, with the attackers (Side A) and attacked (Side B) also identified. This allows for analysis of the contexts in which lethal violence occurred, and the establishment of patterns by which the three Hypotheses can be considered, while the inclusion of coordinates of the locations of all events allows for detailed spatial analysis and the generation of maps.

The methodology of my empirical analysis will follow a hypothetico-deductive method seeking to either corroborate or falsify the three Hypotheses, through the use of qualitative discussion of the coded events and their patterns. Besides reflecting my personal preference and skills, the use of qualitative rather than quantitative analysis is better suited to the nature of my source material, which often lacks details such as gender and age ratios of casualties, and to the temporally and spatially focused nature of my study.

The primary source material on which my event coding is based is primarily two collections of primary sources from 1941. The first is Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svijetkov ratu4 (1993) (from here on, Zločini, document no. xxx), and the second is Zbornik dokumenata i podotaka o narodno-oslobodićkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda5 (published through the 1950s and 1960s) specifically the volumes on Croatia (from here on, Zbornik V. book nos. 1, 2, 30 or 32, document no. xxx), and the volume of Italian documents from 1941 (from here on Zbornik Xiii.1, document no. xxx). I also used archival sources, Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archive of Yugoslavia) fond 110 (AJ 110), the records from the investigations in Lika of the post-war Commission For the Establishment of the Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators. Of great use was Zatezalo’s (2005) anthology of witness statements, which has a complete list of Ustaše killing sites in Lika, with all available elementary details on each.

The main issue is that Zbornik tends to focus on military combat, to the detriment of documentation of war crimes, indicative of Communist-era focus on resistance, and desire to dilute and forget the fratricidal conflict whose resurrection

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4 “Crimes on Yugoslav Territories in the First and Second World Wars.”
5 “Collection of Documents and Facts Concerning the People’s Liberation War of the Yugoslav Peoples.”
would have mortally threatened Tito’s Yugoslavia. Moreover, in giving documents from both the Partisan and Axis sides, there are many events where directly contradictory accounts are given, and in proceeding, as well as using source criticism I have had to use my best judgement.

The other sources are generally speaking the opposite, mainly documenting war crimes, sometimes with little context given, though the knowledge of the military situation gleaned from Zbornik has allowed me to bypass that issue. The bigger issue is the focus. The documentation of the Commission (AJ 110) reflects the judicial desire of that body, namely its intent to prosecute individuals (see Dulić 2015a). This, on one hand, gives valuable detail about individual local Ustaše, and details useful for my purposes on the gender and age of victims. But, it only covers a minority of the cases of mass killings in Lika, while the unstructured nature of the testimonies can result in significant omissions and misbalances due to the length of time between testimony and event, and due to what the individual himself focuses on and remembers best. Particularly notable is convolution about dates and periods.

Zločini and especially Zatezalo (2005) are focused on documentation of Ustaše crimes in a more systematic way. In Zločini, however, many documents are written by actors such as Domobran officers and gendarmes, whose professional concerns do not necessarily involve conveying all necessary data on atrocities, while those from the Partisan side likewise often betray a concern with combat. Though the witness statements included by Zatezalo (2005) bear the same issues as those in AJ 110, Zatezalo’s most important contribution is his list of killing sites in Lika, in which he conveys all available details including the rough number of victims at each site, elementary gender and age information, and where possible dates. Hence, Zatezalo (2005) has been the easiest to work with.

The focus of all these primary sources, however, insofar as they document war crimes, has been heavily on those crimes committed by the Axis side. Hence, for those committed by insurgents, I have had to rely on secondary literature, namely Bergholz (2010, 2016), Dizdar and Sobolevski (1999), and Jareb (2011). However, as these were far fewer in number, this has not amounted to a serious issue.
Chapter Two: Background

The Lika Region

The ten (modern-day) municipalities that my event coding covered are as follows: Gospić, Lovinac, Perušić, Otočac, Brinje, Vrhovine, Plitvice Lakes, Donji Lapac, Udbina and Gračac. I have treated as within my area of study the Kulen Vakuf area, a pocket of Bosnian territory on the Western bank of the Una (generally the Lika-Bosnia boundary). As well as being necessary due to the inseparability of events there and in Donji Lapac, including Kulen Vakuf, a Muslim-majority area, added a rich third cultural dimension, while the massacre there was committed in substantial part by men from Lika—thus is completely part of the regional dynamics—and in being a rare Partisan-perpetrated case of indiscriminate violence adds a vital angle for theoretical analysis largely lacking otherwise. Some qualitative analysis of events outside these areas has also been necessary for context’s sake, especially in Kordun (to Lika’s North), and in North-Western Bosnia, whose dynamics Lapac and Kulen Vakuf were completely tied up with. In 1941, Lika was divided between two župe (Counties). Most of it formed Lika-Gacka County, whose seat was Gospić, and whose first Commissioner was Frković. Donji Lapac, Kulen Vakuf and Korenica (Plitvice) were part of Krbava-Psat County (though Korenica was transferred to Lika-Gacka in November), with its seat in Bihać, with its first Commissioner Ljubomir Kvaternik (Zločini no. 373).
Immediate Context: Establishment of the State, and the Onset of Violence

On 10 April 1941, the NDH, an Italian-German protectorate, was founded on the ruins of Yugoslavia, invaded suddenly in retaliation for the coup that had reversed Yugoslavia’s Axis entry. Though an annoying diversion for Germany, the conquest of Yugoslavia nevertheless provided her with an opportunity to annex more territory (North-Central Slovenia), and for her allies to be appeased. Italy doubled its territory in Dalmatia and Western Slovenia, received a sphere of influence as far East as central Bosnia, through which the demarcation line between the Italian and German spheres of influence ran, and over all of Montenegro; while her puppet, Albania, was given Kosovo, and parts of Macedonia and Montenegro. Bulgaria was also allowed to
undo her humiliation in the Second Balkan and First World Wars by annexing the rest of Macedonia and the “Western Outlands”. Hungary was also given parcels of land in the North. (See Dulić 2005, 77-79; Lampe 2000, 201-210.)

Though much of the Croatian coast was lost, the Eastern aspirations of Croatian nationalism were generally attained: all of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Srijem. Their half-hearted attempt to annex Bosniak-majority Sandžak was unsuccessful, but this area was of less importance, like Italian-controlled Istria “Croatian ethnic, but not historic, territory” (Bartulin 2014, 133).

Figure 2: The Dismemberment of Yugoslavia

*Bosniaks are essentially the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian-speaking Muslims (as opposed to Albanian, Macedonian or Turkish-speaking Muslims) of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sandžak, and even Kosovo (not to be confused with the Albanian Muslim majority there). They were considered by the NDH to be “ethnic Croats of the Islamic faith” (see Bartulin 2014, 120-124).
The Ustaše movement, which had returned with the invaders from exile, was given power over the state, pliable puppets of the Axis. Besides this core group of 700 paramilitarized exiles, the movement had a significant membership in Croatia as well (Dulić 2005, 81; Miljan 2016). In their period of exile in Italy since 1929, they had come under increasing Fascist, and Nazi, influence, framing their dislike of Serbs through the lens of fascism, and also increasingly adopting the Nazis’ anti-Semitic ideology⁷. They moved rapidly with their program of “nationalizing war”, moving to consolidate power at grassroots level with a decree issued on 10 April itself commanding local Ustaše to mobilize and establish power in every area (Zločini no. 5).

On 30 April, twenty days after being gifted power, racial laws against Jews and Roma were introduced, extremely similar to Nazi Germany’s, defining exactly who would be legally considered a Jew and proscribing rights, including marriage to non-Jews (Zločini nos. 15, 16, 17). Though Serbs were never defined racially, numerous decrees made them personae non gratae in practice. The first decree against the Serbs banned use of the Cyrillic alphabet, on 25 April (Zločini no. 11). From the first days Ustaše throughout Croatia, called up by Pavelić, began to fill local jails with internees, mainly prominent male Serbs and Jews, the first signs of gendered de-capitation, and some anti-fascist Croats (S. Goldstein 2013, 3-58).

The Ustaše regime thus wasted no time in consolidating both the political power of their movement, and the “nationalizing” basis of their legal apparatus and state. While the basis of citizenship and of membership in the national body was “Aryan blood”—ergo excluding Jews and Roma (Zločini no. 15,16, 17)—further Decrees continued to define Serbs as the national other, such as a Decree (3 May) regulating conversions (by which they could regulate voluntary Serb assimilation through conversion to Catholicism) (Zločini no. 18).

The Ustaše’s ideological views on Serbs had been revolutionized due to the political situation in the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom (Bartulin 2014, 127-143). However, the closest thing to a clear Ustaše ideological view on what the Serbs were was that formulated by Lorković, the NDH Foreign Minister. He argued that the Serbs

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⁷ See, for example: Dulić 2005; I. Goldstein 1996; Lampe 2000; Miljan 2016.
had a threefold origin, namely Vlachs\(^8\) who had settled in Croatia (having served in Ottoman armies), settlers from Serbia who arrived to settle the Military Frontier\(^9\), and Catholic Croats who had been pressured into conversion by the Ottoman-favoured Orthodox Church (Bartulin 2014, 135). The only thing that held them together, according to Lorković, was the Orthodox clergy especially, and nationally conscious elites (Bartulin 2014, 135). This lies behind their targeting of such categories first.

Even before the racial laws, anti-Serb lethal violence had begun. On 17 April, the first killing of Serbs had taken place, at Staro Petrovo Selo in Slavonia, where twenty-five men had been executed (Zločini no. 13). On the same day, sanctioning this massacre (see Fein 1993), the Decree for the Protection of Nation and State was issued, allowing for the creation of Special Courts of three judges, to be named by the Justice Minister (Mirko Puk), which prescribed the death sentence for those who threatened the existence or vital interests of the new state, what constituted such offences being open to the interpretation of Ustaše-appointed judges (Zločini no. 10).

It was likewise the alleged presence of recalcitrant Yugoslav military that led to the first major massacre, of 184 Serb men at Gudovac near Bjelovar on 27-28 April (S. Goldstein 2013, 107-114; Jelić-Butić 1977, 162). Before the massacre, the first mass arrest had taken place, of most of the adult male inhabitants of nearby Grubišno Polje, sent to the Danica camp, established in the first days of the state (S. Goldstein 2013, 107-114). They may have initially been taken as hostages to deter potential resistance, as the Wehrmacht did with Jews and Roma in Serbia in 1941 (Manošek 2007).

The first violent incidents in Lika, of a sporadic level and still largely non-lethal, began in April in the context of local Ustaše consolidation, although the level was lower than in the Bjelovar area. For example, on 18 April, following the mobilization of local Ustaše in Sveti Rok, Ričice and Lovinac, these assembled and went to the hamlet of Gnjatovići, part of the village of Raduč (Zatezalo 2005, 307-308). They began by insisting that the Serb villagers must pay money to the local NDH authorities, but ended up simply robbing the inhabitants, taking money and

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\(^8\) The Vlachs are a traditionally semi-nomadic people speaking a Romance language, found across the Balkans. However, in Croatia the term has often been used merely as a derogatory term for Serbs (see Bartulin 2014).

\(^9\) The Military Frontier, or Vojna Krajina, is broadly the Croatia-Bosnia border regions, which between the end of the Seventeenth Century and 1878 were militarized by the Austrians and Ottomans (see Malcolm 1996, 70-81). Lika is part of this region.
livestock. Several of the villagers fled to Serbia: it is difficult to determine whether this was an intended result, though likely a welcome consequence.

On 20 April, a joint Ustaše-Italian patrol from Gospić reached the Serb village of Divoselo. There the Ustaše plundered half a dozen houses and killed one villager. The Gračac Ustaše quickly gained such a reputation. On 4 May, Pavičić, a local Ustaše from Gračac, with four others, set out for the Serb hamlet of Veselinovići: here they robbed the villagers, burnt two houses and raped one woman (Zločini no. 23).

It seems from the prevalence of theft that early recruitment to the “wild Ustaše” (locally organized village-level groups outside the formal command structure [see Jug 2004]) can to an extent be explained by arguments on loot-seeking (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000), or what Kalyvas more elegantly refers to as “the privatization of politics” (2006, 14, 330-363). However, one should not underestimate the importance of ideology in rank-and-file recruitment: “wild Ustaše” may have had material or personal motivations, but many would also most certainly be from what Mann calls social and geographic “nationalist core constituencies” (2005, 8-9). That said, it remains difficult to glean personalized information on these “wild Ustaše”.

Part Two: Empirical Analysis

Chapter Three: The First Wave of Killings

Towards a Pattern of Killings

Through the month of May, thanks to the Ustaše elites, the atmosphere across the state was radicalizing.

On the evening of 5 May, there was a coordinated series of killings across Croatia of prominent Serb men. The first mass killing in Lika happened on this
night—twenty-six Serb men from Gračac and environs, murdered at Macolina Jama, between Gospić and Perušić (S. Goldstein 2013, 98).

On May 6, some resistance had occurred near Sanski Most to “wild Ustaše” who were raiding a village: the Germans intervened, crushing the resistance (S. Goldstein 2013, 98). This was used as one of the pretexts for what followed on May 9, when approximately 400 hundred Serb men were executed at Blagaj, in Kordun North of Lika (S. Goldstein 2013, 115-125; Zločini no. 77). Hundreds of Serb men from the surrounding villages had been arrested (after a Catholic family was murdered) by Ustaše émigrés and local Ustaše: a special court was convened, yet when it broke up to deliberate, Puk, the justice minister, appointed a new court made up simply of leading Ustaše, who immediately sentenced more than thirty to death (S. Goldstein 2013, 115-125). Following their execution, Luburić simply executed the remaining detainees anyway (S. Goldstein 2013, 115-125). Luburić, two months later, would lead the first genocidal massacres in Lika in early July. Blagaj was Luburić’s first “precedent of impunity”, to use Midlarsky’s (2005, 61-63) term.

This coordinated series of killings in early May was purportedly responding to rumours of a Serb uprising on Đurđevdan (St George’s Day), an important Orthodox holiday celebrated on 6 May, which the resistance in Sanski Most and murder of the family was claimed to be proof of (S. Goldstein 2013, 115-125).

Only days later, on the evening of 12-13 May, another massacre of 300 men happened, this time in Glina, in Banija, in an operation organised by Puk, who was from Glina and leader of the local Ustaše as well as the national justice minister, and by “Dido” Kvaternik who carried it out using, in the emerging pattern, both émigrés and local Ustaše recruits (S. Goldstein 2013, 125-133; Krizman 1980, 117-137). This time, there was no court, no legalistic pretence: this suggests that precedents of impunity (Kvaternik had received his at Gudovac, where he had gotten away with it despite protests from a German officer [S. Goldstein 2013, 107-114]) had precluded the need to even pretend to have a pretext; and as these were elite-orchestrated massacres, the “privatization of politics” seems not to have been an organizational factor, rank-and-file motivations aside.

Demonstrating Dulić and Hall’s (2014) argument, these first national level elite-driven massacres thus targeted the Krajina region, geographically central and with a Serb majority.
In the meantime through May, Ustaše regional and local elites consolidated their control in Lika, emboldened by this climate. This increases the extent to which Lika was a Zone 1 area, according to Kalyvas (2006), where incumbent violence should be selective; yet where according to H1, it should become increasingly indiscriminate as long as the nationalizing Ustaše are in control. On 17 May, a Special Court for the judicial district of Gospić was established by a decree from Puk (Zločini no. 39)—the same mechanism (and individual) that had been behind the Blagaj massacre. This would be an important part of the camp system set up around Gospić.

May-June: “Decapitating” Serb Communities

In early June, Zagreb instituted a policy shift due to pressure from Germany—which though encouraging the Ustaše policy of “national intolerance” and naturally sympathetic to their desire for “ethnic purity”, was concerned about the effects of the massacres that had happened so far, attracting criticism from German officers, and also provoking the first armed resistance in Herzegovina in early June (Dulić 2005, 130-136). This shift was twofold: towards what Mann calls “policed deportations” (2005, 12) of specific groups of Serbs, more carefully defined by decree; and steps towards the centralization and institutionalization of killing, especially at the Gospić-Velebit-Pag Camp system in Western Lika (see Chapter Four).

In line with the first shift, an agreement was reached on 4 June for the implementation of a “population exchange” between The Third Reich and the NDH, mandating the expulsion in organized waves of ethnic Slovenes out of Styria, which had been annexed to Greater Germany, and into Croatia; in return, the Germans would allow the NDH to expel equal numbers of Serbs out of Croatia into Serbia, under German occupation (Zločini no. 48). The Slovene refugees would be settled in the homes of the expelled Serbs; the Nedić Government’s Commissariat for Refugees would receive the latter (Zločini no. 48).

This “population exchange” was helpful to both the Nazis and the Ustaše in achieving their idea of homogenous states. There were numerous precedents for this form of officialized ethnic cleansing, for example the Treaty of Lausanne (see Mann

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10 Serbia’s collaborationist Government.
2005, 67-68), and Hitler and Mussolini’s “South Tyrol Option Agreement” giving Germans in the region the choice of Italianization or relocation (see Latour 1965). The Nazis were pursuing what Ferenc (1978) calls a “politics of denationalization” towards their newfound Slovene minority, not dissimilar to that pursued by Italy towards its Slovenes and Croats. This included linguicide and suppression of culturally active elements (Ferenc 1978). But, more radical than the Italians, the Germans deemed that necessary to the success of this policy was the expulsion of many Slovenes, especially “intellectuals” (who in fascist documents are depicted almost as a racial category, similar to Khmer Rouge dialogue), such as clergy and nationalists, who were to be the first deported (Zločini no. 48).

The Ustaše chose a similar sub-group of Serbs to deport, in a manner that did mimic the policy of the Nazis, but also reflected the above-discussed Ustaše idea that settlers from Serbia proper and the Orthodox Clergy had been historically responsible for duping Catholic Croats into the superficial Serb identity (Bartulin 2014, 135). Unlike with actual Vlach speakers, it was impossible to isolate what element of the Serbs should be defined as “Vlachs”. However, Serb elites were easier to identify: Orthodox clergy, and the new category defined by Ustaše decree and slated for expulsion: Srbijanci, “Serbians”, a national term and not an ethnic term like “Serbs” (Srbi) (Dulić 2005, 87, 96).

In a decree on 7 June, Srbijanci were defined as persons from Serbia who had settled on the territory of the NDH since 1 January 1900, and anybody descended from such a person (Zločini no. 54). The same decree required Srbijanci to register with local Ustaše authorities. This, in theory, constituted a shift away from massacres and towards a spatially unlimited targeting of a selective elite group seen as the most dangerous sub-population: i.e. “decapitation”. It is interesting to note that the population exchange and definition of Srbijanci coincided with anti-Semitic Decrees on 5 June, requiring Jews to register property (Zločini no. 49) and forbidding the concealment of Jewish property (Zločini no. 51).

However, despite the theoretical desire to deport Srbijanci and clergy, what often happened instead in Lika through June, were killings of groups of Serb men, often including Orthodox priests who in theory may have been eligible for deportation, as well as ethnic cleansing of Serb villages in toto, around Plitvice Lakes. Moreover, this Srbijanci distinction was soon made redundant in July when the term
“Greek-Easterner” became the term of use, “denying [in a new way] the existence of a Serbian ethnic group as such in the NDH” (Dulić 2005, 87). In Lika, local Ustaše elites began to resort to targeted killings in order to implement what Zagreb had basically said was necessary, namely the removal of the Serbian Orthodox clergy, and other Serb elites, from Croatia. Though for now official policy was to expel as many Orthodox priests as the Germans expelled Slovenian Catholic clergy, local “wild Ustaše” in Lika simply killed several priests, a sanctioned target thanks to elite policy, with impunity. This is the beginning of what I have called the “decapitation” of Serb communities: this policy includes deportations that did happen (merely a less lethal form of “decapitation”), though my focus is on killings.

The first of these June killings was again targeted at local prominent Serbs in the town of Graćac. In Lika as across the state, arrests of prominent Serbs were taking place, and some killings. However, this time the Ustaše in Graćac, who as discussed had already killed thirty-five at Macolina Jama during the Đurđevdan killings, went further. The initial Ustaše commander in the town had been Stjepan Šarić, from nearby Lovinac, and under his rule in April there had already been at least one murder, of the Serb former police commander of the town: he had been thrown into a pit behind the railway station (AJ 110-264-859). Soon after Šarić was transferred, he was replaced by Šikić, an Ustaše from Gospić: responsible for the Macolina killings and now for the second Graćac massacre, he had also brought with him a dozen men from Gospić to complement the local Graćac Ustaše, the latter including Pavičić, who had led the raid on Veselinović (AJ 110-264-859).

At the end of May, they rounded up around eighty prominent Serbs from the town, including the Orthodox priest, Mandić, the doctor, Torbica, and a court clerk, Gaćeša (AJ 110-264-859). They were tortured in the Ustaše building, the former police station, with Torbica and the priest—whose beard was cut (this often was done to humiliate Orthodox priests, for whom the beard has a spiritual significance)— singled out particularly. Told they would be transferred to the larger prison in Gospić, they were instead driven to a locality know as “Plantaža” near Medak and killed using primitive weapons (AJ 110-264-859).

The next atrocity was sanctioned directly by the Ustaše national elite. Budak visited his home village, Sveti Rok, outside Lovinac, on 10 June (Zatezalo 2005, 307-308), only a few kilometres North of Graćac. In Lovinac, he spoke to a large crowd of
locals, allegedly encouraging killing of Serbs. Following this, Rosandić, an Ustaše commander from Gospić accompanying Budak, gathered local Ustaše, ordering a killing to be carried out. On the following night, these local Ustaše went again to the hamlet of Gnjatovići and there arrested around twenty Serb men from the same extended family, most of the males of the settlement. They executed eighteen of them nearby, using knives and hammers, burying them in a mass grave above the village (Zatezalo 2005, 307-308). Considering the attempt on 4 June to shift to orderly deportations, this event shows that even insofar as elites were concerned, let alone “wild Ustaše”, there was a serious divergence between theory and practice, the former postulating non-lethal decapitation, the latter executing lethal decapitation. Note also the three levels of elites: Budak (national), Rosandić (regional), “wild Ustaše” (local).

The violence spread to the Donji Lapac area, under the command of an Ustaše Youth activist (AJ 110-288-843). On the evening of 18 June, the Orthodox priest from Suvaja was pulled out of the car he was travelling in and executed in a forest (Zločini no. 133). On the following day, under a legal pretext (regarding the sale of corn) from the Ustaše judge in Donji Lapac, Marinković, six men were arrested by a group of thirty Ustaše who raided the hamlet of Bubanj to the South-East of Lapac, an Orthodox hamlet between two larger Catholic and Muslim villages. The party was made of Catholic Ustaše from Boričevac to the West of Bubanj, and Muslim Ustaše from Ostrovica to the East. The villagers of Ostrovica had an enmity with Bubanj over land (Zločini, no. 123), most likely related to the redistribution of land to Serbs in the interwar period at the expense of Muslims, land generally having been a serious bone of historical contention between the two groups (Bergholz 2010, 33-64; Dulić 2005, 66-69). This is a clear example of the “privatization of politics” (Kalyvas 2006, 330-363) as a catalyst for recruitment to nationalizing war: catalyst because it speeded up an ideological process that was happening anyway.

The six men were killed at a pit known as Jasenovača-Jaskovac, in the forest around Bubanj (Zatezalo 2005, 340). Marinković had done this already: on 5 June, with a pretext from this judge, fifty Ustaše, lead by Kokotić from Perušić who had been stationed in Donji Lapac, had raided Gajina, and arrested two men who were tortured at Donji Lapac jail for eight days and killed at Kuk, a sinkhole outside Donji Lapac (AJ 110-288-843).
With the same local Ustaše roaming the area of the villages South of Donji Lapac, robberies of Serb rural houses were taking place with many murders: for example Mileušnić’s testimony mentions one murder near Osredci (Zatezalo 2005, 294-302), while twenty-four villagers of Gajina, including three women, were killed at the Boričevac pit, having been arrested by Kokotić’s men and tortured, through June and early July (AJ 110-288-843). These “wild Ustaše” also rounded up sixteen Serb men from the area, killing them on 26 June at the “Kuk” sinkhole (Zatezalo 2005, 294-302).

Though the escalation of brutality had been, and was about to become, more intense still in South-Eastern Lika, in the West of the region atrocities had also continued, showing the same idea of decapitation. On 25 June, another massacre of a selected group of sixteen men took place at the Škramnica pit outside Kutarevo. They were killed with axes and knives (Zatezalo 2005, 341). This group included an Orthodox priest, who again could have been deported, and a court functionary. The latter category, Serbs who worked for the legal and justice systems, was noticeably targeted, likely reflecting the Ustaše desire to destroy the (disproportionately Serb) police and legal system of the hated Yugoslavia (see Lampe 2000) and supplant it with their own Special Courts and Decrees. For example, the first victim murdered in Gračac was the former police chief, while a Serb court clerk was killed in the town’s second massacre (AJ 110-264-859).

According to Zatezalo, there was also a “slaughter of Serb girls” near Ljubovo in June (2005, 340), though I found no further details on this event: however, like the killing of three women mentioned above, we are starting to see a de-gendering of violence, a key step as young girls were not priests, officers or policemen, and could hardly be said to conceivably pose a security or ideological threat, unless the whole group is viewed as such, in line with a “nationalizing war” idea.

Localized killing sites were emerging in Lika through June, notably at “Kuk”, Macolina Jama, “Plataža” outside Medak (Zločini no. 133), and the Boričevac pit. These were ideal for localized killing of smaller groups, for localized lethal decapitation, in line with H1’s prediction that this will first be observed. However, these localized killing sites in late June were steps towards a much greater operation of what Dulić (2005, 242-299) calls institutionalized destruction, at the Gospić-Velebit-Pag camps from 24 June.
In the arrests in South-Eastern Lika, in the second half of June, the majority were not killed on site, but deported to Gospić and sent into the camp system: according to S. Goldstein 140 Serb men in total were arrested around Donji Lapac between 14 and 29 June, with similar numbers simultaneously arrested in and around Gospić (2013, 151). These were to be sent into the camps that began operating on 24 June. Just as small prisons and hostage-holding centres across the country began to send their prisoners to Gospić in late June, so too local holding centres were used in Lika, effectively as miniature transit camps on the way to Gospić. The schoolhouse in Donji Lapac and prison in Boričevac were examples used in early summer, where torture occurred as well: the veliki Magazin in Korenica and police station in Bunić would become so later in the summer (see Zatezalo 2005).

**Ethnic Cleansing in Plitvice Lakes**

However, at the end of June, this trend towards deportations, with some localized killings, of adult Serb men to Gospić suddenly changed in a radical direction in Eastern Lika.

One reason for this in Lika may be that Serb men had fled to the forests, with news spreading of the Ustaše massacres, and so men to be deported were not easily apprehended (S. Goldstein 2013; Zločini no. 90). This may also explain the above trend towards killings by frustrated local Ustaše, many already desensitized to killing and perhaps bearing personal grudges towards the Serb individuals in question. For example, the sixteen men killed at Kuk had all been apprehended while in hiding, having run into a group of “wild Ustaše” from Boričevac (Zatezalo 2005, 294-302). Moreover, the population exchange as a policy was losing favour—since even if completed, it would have only removed a small proportion of Serbs (Dulić 2005, 97-99).

Hence, Ustaše policy now moved away from the theoretical idea of spatially-even deportations of a defined category of Serbs, towards an easier policy of simply clearing an entire area of Serbs. The area chosen was Plitvice Lakes, North-Eastern Lika (S. Goldstein 2013, 151-154; Zločini no. 90, 91). There were two spatial logics to this. The first was strategic: there was now a real fear of rebellion spreading North
from Herzegovina to Krajina, and the massing of much of the male population in forests seemed to be proof (S. Goldstein 2013, 151-154).

This temporal period again had cultural significance: 28 June is Vidovdan (St. Vitius Day), the anniversary both of the Serb defeat at Kosovo Polje in 1389, and of the “Vidovdan Constitution” of 1921 which had centralized Serbian control in the Kingdom (see Lampe 2000). Like in early May, rumours of Serb rebellion spreading to Lika were circulating (Zločini no. 90), fuelling the localized insecurity Dulić argues is necessary for local implementation of what I call “nationalizing war”, as the elites driving the latter promise security (Dulić 2005, 39). Whether a genuine fear of the Herzegovina rebellion spreading to Lika and Krajina, or a welcome pretext, or more likely both, this was key to the context of the assault on Eastern Lika in the week after Vidovdan. Hostage-taking across the state as a preclusion had already occurred, which the arrests in Donji Lapac were broadly part of: Pavić, two days before Vidovdan, issued a decree that was twofold, sanctioning force anywhere Serb militants emerged, but also guaranteeing Serbs’ rights and promising punishment for anyone who attacked them, blaming the Jews for spreading Vidovdan rumours, and so justifying a wave of arrests of Jews to be sent to Gospić (Zločini no. 84). This more balanced policy of pre-emptive hostage taking was less important in Lika, where as we will see more radical forms of violence against Serbs took centre stage after Vidovdan.

The Serb-majority cordon of Krajina is particularly thin in Eastern Lika: to the West, there is a North-South line of Catholic-majority towns (Otočac, Perušić, Gospić, Lovinac, Gračac, already in the process of decapitating their Serb minorities) and to the East are the Muslim majority cities of Cazin and Bihać (the latter already cleansed of Serbs and Jews, who had been expelled and deported to Kulen Vakuf [Zločini no. 87, 90, 91]): whilst running South from Bihać there is a string of Muslim villages along the Una (Kulen Vakuf, Ostrovica, Kalati).

The idea of breaking the territorial contiguity of Serb-majority regions must have firstly been ideologically tempting to the Ustaše, but also perhaps a pre-emptive strike against the now more founded fear of a rebellion. Hence, the targeting of the Serb-majority areas reflects Dulić and Hall’s (2014) argument that the Ustaše first targeted areas of Serb demographic advantage where resistance was anticipated, in line with H3.
This must be understood in relation to events in Krajina more broadly, where the initial Ustaše policy seems to reflect this same priority of breaking the Serb-majority boomerang in the heart of the NDH (Dulić and Hall 2014). Besides the cleansing of Bihać of Serbs and Jews and the coming gender-neutral massacres in South-Eastern Lika, to the South Dalmatinska Zagora had already seen one huge gender-neutral massacre at Kistanje (Zatezalo 2005, 336). To the East, Gutić, Ustaše Commissioner in Banja Luka, followed a policy of “liquidating” Bosanska Krajina, the largest district of Krajina and the most strategic, lying between Zagreb and Banja Luka (Dulić 2005, 217-241).

Though this should not be taken to mean that Krajina was the sole focus of attacks—it was not, and “murderous cleansing” (Mann 2005, 12) had reached large proportions in Herzegovina earlier (Dulić 2005, 123-175)—it does seem to have been where the priority of the Ustaše elite lay in summer 1941, with national-level Ustaše such as Kvaternik and Luburić taking a direct role.

The second spatial reason why Plitvice was chosen for ethnic cleansing over other areas is symbolic. S. Goldstein (2013, 151-154) argues that Pavelić wished to create a natural reserve for state visitors in this area, world famous for its spectacular waterfalls and forests, with local Ustaše awarded with houses of the expelled (S. Goldstein 2013, 151-154). More than 1,000 Serbs, mostly women, children and elderly, were expelled without warning on 29 June from Končarev Kraj and other villages around Plitvice Lakes by Ustaše from Bihać (Zločini no. 90, 91).

They were only brought as far as Drvar by an Ustaše escort: there appears to have been no effort to move them on from there, where they were lodged with local Serbs, which contributed to alarm spreading amongst the Serbs, and where many would join the Drvar Partisan Brigade (S. Goldstein 2013, 151-154). Alarm was already present since the Ustaše authorities in Bihać had deported the city’s entire Serb and Jewish populations to Kulen Vakuf on 24 June (Zločini no. 87, 90, 91). Though the expulsions from Plitvice were ordered from the top (S. Goldstein 2013, 151-154), the expulsions of Serbs and Jews from Bihać itself, ordered by the local Ustaše commissioner (Zločini no. 102), were more similar to the process of localized ethnic cleansing of Jews and Poles that occurred in annexed areas of Poland, contributing to the mounting problem of the failure of territorial solutions to the Jewish question (see Hilberg 1985); just as the failure/shortcoming of the population
exchange, and the failure of a solution for the expellees from Plitvice and Bihać, could be said to be contributing to the radicalization of Ustaše policy on regional (Krbava-Psat) and national levels.

**From Ethnic Cleansing to Full-Scale Massacre: Suvaja**

In South-Eastern Lika, due to the events discussed above in June, the situation was similar, with the men hiding out in the forest (*Zločini* no. 116). As the massacres had not yet led to women and children being killed, they had mainly stayed in the villages, as in Plitvice: the Ustaše “decapitations” had so far been gendered.

This abruptly changed on 1 July when Luburić arrived in Suvaja, South of Donji Lapac. He had been given a “special assignment” of “cleansing” in Krbava-Psat, to respond to the disorder that was brewing, though his role in the Plitvice expulsions is unclear (S. Goldstein 2013, 154-155). Donji Lapac was the most troublesome spot, and there had allegedly been some gunfire from the men in the forest near Suvaja (*Zločini* no. 116), the pretext.

All NDH personnel in Krbava-Psat had been ordered to answer to Luburić until he left: so he had a huge force with him, about 400, consisting of 150 Ustaše returnees from the Auxiliary Force, men from Bihać and Western Lika, 250 Domobrani sent from Gospić (22nd Infantry Battalion), who were to provide security for the Ustaše by guarding the flanks of the villages they were massacring, and local “wild Ustaše” (S. Goldstein 2013, 154-155). The presence of the Domobrani shows, like with Germany, that the regular military was not a “clean”, honourable force, as Nolte argued with the Wehrmacht, but often a facilitator of and participant in lethal “nationalizing war”.

On 1 July, Luburić attacked Suvaja from Srb to the South, with the Ustaše Auxiliaries arriving in trucks, and the Domobrani fanning out around the village (S. Goldstein 2013, 154-155). Some of the women and children managed to escape, but most were killed. Most were killed using knives, clubs and axes—only some shot, possibly by Domobrani while trying to run for the woods. Many were burnt alive in houses, a practically easy tactic popular with Ustaše. I would say the reasons are that it saved ammunition, made escape more difficult, avoided forcing men to kill people more directly—both messy and psychologically disturbing (also likely done because
of ammunition shortages). So that it was an ideological two-in-one, both killing the people and erasing their heritage and traces of their presence.

Estimates of the death toll at Suvaja range from 170-300. Zatezalo (2005, 355) gives 243, which is probably the most likely given that the Carabinieri report (Zločini no. 133) claims that 170 were thrown into three pits, and more people killed by burning. It seems 170 were murdered and thrown into pits and seventy burned in houses. Zatezalo gives 118 children (including infants), seventy-five women and fifty men as killed in total (2005, 355). Apparently, the pregnant wife of the Orthodox priest, who had already been murdered on 19 June, had her stomach cut open and her unborn child killed (Zločini no. 133). This crime was likely committed by local Ustaše, as the others would probably not have known who she was. These local Ustaše in the Donji Lapac area had committed many murders already, so like Luburić at Blagaj they had received their precedents of impunity, and indeed were now taking part in a directly sanctioned massacre (see Kelman 1973).

Suvaja, where children were the majority of victims, was only the first and worst of half a dozen indiscriminate massacres, led by Luburić, largely targeting women and children in South-Eastern Lika in early July. It is interesting to note that this key milestone, a radicalization from selective gendered killings, occurred in a remote village: testing the water through mass killing is perhaps more likely to succeed in the countryside than in large towns.

The following day, Luburić’s forces committed a second atrocity in the area, killing twenty-five civilians in Osredci, mostly by burning them in their houses with incendiary bombs (Zločini no. 133). The same day, they killed another thirty-two villagers from the same area and threw them into a pit at “Draga Kačetina”, a forest above Osredci (Zatezalo 2005, 355).

On 3 July, Luburić’s forces fanned out into smaller units, possibly because they had met no resistance from the helpless and unarmed men in the forest, hence had less need for safety in numbers with Domobrani protection. This tactic allowed them to simultaneously entrap and exterminate several hamlets along the Bosnian border: though word was surely spreading amongst villages, the fact that so far the Ustaše had been moving as a group from village to village may have led most villages to believe that lying low would keep them safe, and they would receive warning from the forest if the Ustaše moved in their direction. Hence, the 3 July massacres show a
shift from one-off massacres of women and children, to an explicit attempt to entrap and exterminate a larger part of the Serbs of the Donji Lapac countryside. As well as the increasingly gender- and age-neutral massacres predicted by H1, we are thus also seeing on a micro-level the increasingly widespread massacres predicted by H3.

On 3 July, in Bubanj, to the East of Dobroselo, 184 were killed, including thirty-five children (Zatezalo 2005, 355), under the pretext that a Croat woman had been assaulted by “Četniks” from there, with the Ustaše including men from Ostrovica and Kule Vakuf (Zločini no. 123), while in the hamlet of Doljanski Bubanj a group of twenty civilians, exclusively made up of women, children and elderly, was killed (Zatezalo 2005, 355). On the same day, one unit went to Dobroselo, burning in houses thirty-eight villagers (Zatezalo 2005, 355); another went to Doljani, and captured sixty-four villagers, killing them at the Jasenovač-Jasikovač pit in nearby Bubanj (Zatezalo 2005, 355).

Another localized deportation occurred on the same day, from Nebljusi, a further-afield village at which one of the Ustaše units had suddenly arrived, with a prepared list of prominent Serb families in the village: arresting sixty-two villagers, including many women and children, they took them by wagon to Boričevac where they were held in the jail and killed at a pit that night in groups chained together at the village’s infamous pit (S. Goldstein 2013, 156). This more organized deportation again points to local Ustaše, whose information on Serb individuals in the area was presumably better.

Violence in Eastern Lika had in two days progressed from a classic case of ethnic cleansing in Plitvice, to the first series of massacres in the state predominantly targeting children, women and elderly. This jump may well be due to the personal role of Luburić and his émigrés, who had already done at least one massacre (though of men), showing that the de-gendering and de-ageing of violence, seeming to confirm H1, was an elite policy: Suvaja was not only a sanctioned genocidal massacre, but one directly undertaken by a representative of the radical elite.

This should not be underestimated. Despite the pernicious role of local “wild Ustaše” who had already been involved in killings and plunder, there was local dissent. S. Goldstein (2013, 156) explains that there were Croat voices warning against the adverse effects, such as a Domobran officer in Donji Lapac who attempted to help survivors and release detainees, and that there were rescuers amongst the
villagers in Boričevac. However, sanctioned and emboldened by the radicalizing genocidal elite, the local fanatics won out: on 12 July, Bubanj was targeted again, when twelve young Serb girls who had survived were tortured, raped and murdered (Zatezalo 2005, 355).

It seems that there was a large overlap between predisposed individuals, local individuals who saw a chance for plunder in these remote villages, and Croatia’s ideological climate—inspired and encouraged by Pavelić, Budak, and ultimately Hitler—of working towards national intolerance and ethnic purity.

Suvaja was of great significance regarding Luburić’s career: he had had already received his precedent of impunity when his simple execution of several hundred detainees at Blagaj without pretence of a trial had gone unpunished (again, Kvaternik had a similar precedent of impunity at Glina). Now, given full validation (see Midlarsky 2005, 61-63) by Pavelić to terrorize as he saw fit in Krbava-Psat, knowing he was immune, he tested the water further at Suvaja and got away with killing infants and elderly. As for the rank-and-file, it should firstly be said that the émigres were part of the Ustaše elite, having spent years with him and Pavelić in exile (Jelić-Butić 1977). The Domobrani can perhaps be explained by situational arguments, like the reserve police discussed by Browning (1992), though there would have been differences between individuals. Some of the locals were likely materialists who saw a chance for plunder and/or personal revenge, the “privatization of politics” (Kalyvas 2006, 330-363), catalysing the massacres by becoming recruits. It however was Luburić, the representative of the radical-ideological elite, who was the common denominator, holding them all together, and licensing all motives (see Kallis 2007).

As Luburić would soon come to be in charge of the Gospić-Velebit-Pag camps, and later become a commandant at Jasenovac—where he would not only play a role in the genocide of Serbs but also in the Holocaust and Porajmos—the position of Suvaja as a radical departure from gendered killings of adult men has real significance.
Chapter Four: The Gospić-Velebit-Pag Camp System

Jadovno: First Steps Towards the Institutionalization of Destruction

Just as localised killing sites were emerging throughout Lika, usually bottomless sinkholes in the karst, the Ustaše elites were planning a national-level killing site in the West of Lika, predominantly on Mount Velebit, also centring on sinkholes. These pits are extremely deep, leading to often-unexplored cave systems hundreds of metres down. Lika villages have many stories about them, including about “baby dragons” that emerge from streams out of the karst (a species of eyeless amphibian endemic to the Velebit caves, occasionally carried out by rainwater).

This points to the strange cultural significance of pits, the main execution sites for Serbs and Jews murdered in Lika, Kordun, Dalmatia and Herzegovina, historically associated with secrecy, darkness, spirits. One could link this to Charlesworth’s (2004) discussion of the symbolic significance of early killing sites of the Holocaust. The idea of using sinkholes as killing sites was not unique to the Ustaše: the Nazis would later do similar massacres of Jews on a vaster scale at sinkholes in Minsk, and at Babi Yar, Kiev (Dwork and van Pelt, 2003). It is interesting to speculate whether they got the idea of sinkholes from the Ustaše, whose first killings at sinkholes began before Barbarossa.

In both cases, this served a practical purpose as well as a symbolic one, as with immolation within houses (also a favourite tactic of Nazis and collaborators in the USSR, both for erasing small Jewish communities, and later in counterinsurgent operations where villages were punished, as immortalised in the film Come and See). The bodies would—on being shot or struck or even pushed (often Ustaše would simply push groups of chained-together detainees straight in)—fall immediately through the narrow opening into the abyss.

Another spatial significance of Velebit, the core part of the camp system, is that it is in the area where the 1932 “Velebit Uprising” had taken place11. It had an ideological significance for the Ustaše, while the choice can also be explained by the

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11 In 1932, a group of Ustaše, mainly from Gospić, raided a remote police station on Velebit, in one of their first armed actions (see Jelić-Butić 1977, 27-30).
fact that many of the Ustaše who helped choose the location, including the Commissioner in Gospić, Frković, and Rukavina, had taken part in the uprising and knew the area (S. Goldstein 2013, 263-264). This was possibly intended to humiliate the victims. Furthermore, Velebit generally has an historic significance for Croatia, as its most famous mountain. Charlesworth (2004) gives one similar example, of Polish collaborators throwing Jews’ bodies into the Vistula, reflecting both a practical disposal measure and a symbolic meaning.

From early June, after Kvaternik had received training at the SS headquarters in Berlin (S. Goldstein 2013, 263), he and the Ustaše government were planning this system of camps, following the German model of what Dulić (2005) calls “institutionalizing” persecution: the idea was to concentrate the internees and hostages they already held in one central camp, along with all future Serb and Jewish deportees (Koljanin 2015; Zatezalo 2007). This reflects H1, that the systematics of persecution will move towards an institutionalized level.

Through early June, as localized killings continued throughout Lika, the sites for the camp were chosen (S. Goldstein 2013, 262-266; Zatezalo 2007). The camps in theory were under the jurisdiction of the Gospić police, but it was, as Koljanin (2015) points out, the elites who controlled the camps: the police were controlled anyway by Kvaternik, who appointed a trusted Ustaše veteran, Rubinić, as Gospić police chief (S. Goldstein 2013, 264-265). The personnel of the camp were under the command of the Ustaše Defence (part of the Ustaše Supervision Service), headed first by Babić, and then by Luburić (Dulić 2005, 82), who was thus soon to continue the extermination of many of Lika’s Serbs and Croatia’s Jews. The camp was centralized further by a decree by RAVSIGUR\(^\text{12}\) from 8 July saying that “Greek Easterners and Jews” arrested due to public safety concerns should be sent to the Gospić police (unlike Catholic and Muslim political prisoners who were to be imprisoned locally), the provision also applying to recent converts, demonstrating an actual rejection of assimilation (Koljanin 2015, 329; Zatezalo 2007). What constituted “security concerns” can be roughly surmised. On the same day the camp system began (24 June), Pavelić awarded Gospić with a city status (Koljanin 2015, 327): it needed recognition as the part of the nation-building project it now was, and perhaps he also wished to mollify its Croat inhabitants. In viewing the level of atomisation shown by

the number of agencies involved, we see how the Ustaše project of “nationalizing war” was moving to an institutionalized level regarding Jews and Serbs, corroborating H1.

The general pattern was that prisoners arrived in Gospić by train, and were taken, chained and in plain view of inhabitants, to the “Štokhauz”, the Austrian jail, right on the main street: there was often torture and rape there (Zatezalo 2007). The use of a national-level transportation system points to the atomisation of destruction (Dulić 2005, 33-34), necessary for systematics to reach an institutionalized level. From there, they would be sent on straight to a killing site, or to Ovčara, a labour site on the nationalized farms of Serbs at the edge of the town, near Smiljan, mainly for Serb and Jewish women and children, where they were put to work, while Jewish prisoners were also made to sweep Gospić’s streets (Zatezalo 2007). Men would be sent to the Jadovno camp on Velebit, where they would work for some days before being killed at one of the many pits around them, the biggest of which was Šaranova Jama (Zatezalo 2007).

Many would be marched over Velebit, often via the transit camp at Baška Ostarija, to Karlobag (where many weak prisoners were thrown into the sea), and from there taken by boat to Pag, where Slana was the men’s camp and Metajna the women’s, and which also had pits for killing nearby (Zatezalo 2007). Many of the Lika Serbs were also simply taken directly from their villages to nearby pits where they were killed, with no separation of gender: hence a significant overlap between the camp system and localized killings sites in Western Lika, many of which had already been operational and were now co-opted into the camp system, such as Macolina Jama (Zatezalo 2007). Therefore, as well as being a national-level killing centre, these camps were an institutionalization in the sense that they were co-opting both regionalized mass killing of Lika’s Serbs and its localized killing sites—also a form of atomisation.

Though the killing centre around Jadovno was remote, there were far less secluded pits. These include the Kulašev pit near the main road between Gospić and Otočac, and two pits near the train station in Ličko Lešće (Zatezalo 2007). Whilst as we know from Zdunić-Lav’s testimony (Zatezalo 1989, 168-199), a Croat from Jadovno, the inhabitants of the hamlet saw columns passing every day which never returned, with one of the main sinkholes for killing at the edge of the village. This
would remind one of the scenes in *Shoah*, where the villagers of Treblinka are interviewed: as there, this arm of the Holocaust, where 2,000 Jews died at an early phase, was much more *ad hoc* and improvised before Auschwitz.

Figure 3: The Gospić Region, including the main sites of the Camp System

**Cumulative Radicalisation in the Karst: Judeocide at Gospić-Velebit-Pag and Its Wider Temporal Significance**

The temporal significance of killings of Jews at these camps is vital, not only regarding Croatia, but vis-á-vis Europe as a whole, and of significant import regarding H1. Whereas with Serbs, the killings had already begun, the Jews as a whole had so far been subjected to non-lethal persecution, namely racial laws, de-nationalisation and so forth, (though some adult Jewish men had been executed in Zagreb as the “intellectual instigators” of crimes of sabotage [*Zbornik* V.1, no. 88]). That was about to change.
The significance of these camps in the *Croatian* Holocaust is well established, by I. Goldstein (2001), S. Goldstein (2013), Koljanin (2015), Zatezalo (2007), and others. It was the first place Jews were killed in large numbers, and seems to reflect the translation of the radicalizing Nazi Jewish policy into Croatia. It was a radicalization from *definition by decree*, robbery and dispossession, all of which had happened in mere months in Croatia (as described above)—not only widespread killing but at a fixed camp, “institutionalized destruction” of Jewish elites (cf. Dulić 2005, 242-281), a strong corrobororation of H1. It was coordinated with a stepping-up of economic dispossession of Jews (and Serbs), with the “Ponova” being established on 24 June to nationalize the property of deportees (Zločini no. 74), showing *atomisation*, the same day as the camp system began. I will instead focus on the following less-considered Europe-wide significance, which also has import regarding H1.

The timing of the opening of the Gospić-Velebit-Pag camps is no coincidence, coming as it did days after Barbarossa. Some Serb prisoners had already been killed at sites that would become part of the camp (Zatezalo 2007), showing the extent to which the camp system was building on established localized killing operations. Just as the first immense gender-neutral massacres of Jews in the Soviet Union began, such as the Iasi Pogrom committed by Romanian forces on 29 June, so too the Ustaše made their leap to organized lethal violence against Jews precisely during these days. Likewise, both perpetrators had *defined* Jews, yet were still not in theory systematically killing them: the 8 July decree technically applied only to those specific Jews who had been arrested, while the Nazis’ Commissar Decree (see Gigliotti and Lang 2005, 177-180) did not explicitly name all Jews. Hence, it was not until the Wannsee Conference that Jews were explicitly and *in theory* being universally killed—reality on the ground aside.

That said, there is a strong argument, to which I subscribe, that the Holocaust had nevertheless begun in late June with Barbarossa: one simple reason being that the figure of six million Jews killed in the Holocaust generally includes the hundreds of thousands who had already been killed by Einsatzgruppen, Romanian forces and collaborators before Wannsee. If one were to define the Holocaust as beginning only with Wannsee, one would have to subtract these from the figure of six million, and then work out how to define the mass killings of Jews before Wannsee. That is not
indefensible, but seems pointless given the stronger argument that Wannsee, as reflected in the conference’s minutes (see Gigliotti and Lang 2005, 243-251), was merely designed to work out the logistics of the total destruction already decided upon, namely those of Operation Reinhardt; if an official decision was made at all to translate the genocidal reality created by bottom-up radicalization into unambiguous policy, such a decision was likely made by Hitler in December (Gerlach 2000). The point is simple: the Holocaust started before it was officialized, already reaching continuous levels of massacre in the Soviet Union before being officially institutionalized at Wannsee, a corroboration regarding the Nazis of H1.

It started with Barbarossa, and every event involving killings of Jews between 22 June 1941 and the Wannsee Conference is thus of vital historiographical importance in explaining the evolution of the Holocaust from radicalizing practice to unequivocal policy, what Browning (1992) calls the fateful months. Jadovno is perhaps the least considered part of this process, and though the number of Jewish victims (just under 2,000 [Zatezalo 2007]) is comparatively small, that does not diminish the theoretical significance. It is unclear, but an interesting question, whether the immediate targeting of Jews for this system of organized lethal violence, just as the invasion began, suggests that—having spent time at SS Headquarters in Berlin—Kvaternik was in on the idea of the de facto role of the Einsatzgruppen (killing Jews) as suggested by S. Goldstein (2013, 263)—and so jumping now on the bandwagon or perhaps even pressurized—or whether the Gospić-Velebit-Pag system was simply a policy more of the Ustaše’s own initiative.

These camps saw the first systematic killing of Jewish deportees outside the Soviet Union, unless one were to count often-lethal ghetto formation and life in Poland as a form of mass killing (see Dwork and van Pelt 2003). It was one of the very first places where Jews were deported to camps specifically to be killed (the vast majority of Jewish men were sent to the Jadovno camp where there were almost no survivors [Zatezalo 2007]): the Nazis’ T4 and 14f13 programs respectively targeted disabled Jews and most Jews already in camps (Dwork and van Pelt 2003), and not only Jews. It was not until later in the summer that long-distance deportations of Jews to killing sites began within the occupied Soviet Union, though some localized deportations to killing centres had started by the end of June, for example at Ponory outside Vilnius (Dwork and van Pelt 2003). On the topic of 14f13 (which Dwork and
van Pelt argue was a *de facto* targeting of all Jews already in the Reich’s camp system [2003, 264]), a direct comparison could be drawn with Jadovno in the sense that it sought to wipe out Jews especially and Serbs already in the NDH’s incarceration system, with the inmates from the Danica Camp and other prisons sent to Gospić (I. Goldstein 2001, 249-301). The comparison could also be drawn with the Wehrmacht’s shooting of interned Serbian Jewish and Roma men (Browning 1983, 1991; Manošek 2007), also a vital step of Balkan *cumulative radicalisation*, showing a progression at least to continuous gendered killings of Jews, corroborating H1.

To say the least, the killing of Jews at Jadovno and the other killing sites within the Gospić-Velebit-Pag system was an important part of the general Europe-wide bottom-up radicalisation that by January 1942 led to the Holocaust becoming an *institutionalized* and highly *atomised* official policy of the Reich—even if the Holocaust specifically within Croatia itself, at this time and later, was generally top down (I. Goldstein 2001). Dwork and van Pelt argue that the Nazis at Wannsee may well have been influenced by the Romanians’ very early and very radical actions with Jews, and wished to do it better (2003, 267), with their immense massacres and localised camp systems in the Odessa region in autumn 1941, and their concentration of the entire Jewish populations of their newly-annexed territories into Transnistria. It is true that Gospić-Velebit-Pag had been eclipsed and perhaps forgotten by the time of Wannsee, but is there any *per se* reason to believe that the Nazis may not have also been influenced by the Ustaše? Indeed, the minutes at Wannsee even hint at this, saying Jewish problems have already largely been solved in Croatia (see Gigliotti and Lang 2005, 248).

So, whereas many previous scholars writing on these camps, and generally on the Holocaust in Croatia, have tended to focus on the Ustaše following the Nazis—and not incorrectly—I maintain that it was bilateral symbiosis, and that the influence may have run both ways to a *meaningful extent*.

On the last point, it should of course also be said that the influence that constitutes bottom-up radicalization was not necessarily specific to persecution of Jews: the massacres of Serbs, and indeed the principle of population exchange, may have contributed as much to the same climate of attempting to outdo other “nationalizing war” perpetrators, in this case prompting the Nazis to do it in a more orderly, effective way than the Ustaše and Romanians: thus *cumulative radicalization*,
as well as not being limited to Nazi functionaries, may not only be limited to persecution of Jews.

It is also interesting to consider, with H1 in mind, the extent to which the killing of Jews at Gospić-Velebit-Pag was gendered and age-sensitive. The majority of Jewish victims were adult men, with around 100 women killed, and fourteen children, mostly male (Koljanin 2015; Zatezalo 2007). So in fact it would seem to still be within the realm of “decapitation”, especially considering that by far the biggest group of Jews were from Zagreb, many of whom were culturally active and younger, and had already been sent to the Danica camp in Koprivnica (I. Goldstein 2001, 247-301). Thus, until the deportations to Jasenovac and Auschwitz in 1942-43 (I. Goldstein 2001), the Ustaše’s policy towards Jews tended to follow that of the Wehrmacht in Serbia, who in autumn 1941 were shooting in retaliation for insurgent attacks adult male Jewish and Roma hostages, taken pre-emptively as a counter-insurgency tactic, but not women, children or the elderly (Browning 1991, 39-57). Though when the Nazis moved to complete extermination of Serbian Jews via gas in December 1941, it is interesting that the main centre was the Sajmište (Semlin) Camp, on the NDH’s territory (Browning 1991; Manošek 2007).

As Koljanin (2015) argues, there were smaller Jewish communities that lost a higher proportion of their members (like Karlovac); and I would add some of the smaller communities such as Travnik had a more even gender distribution, even if the total number of individuals was in the teens. Furthermore, with deportees from Koprivnica, though all victims sent to Gospić of any nationality were male, a higher proportion were Jews13.

However, one possible exception to the trend (so far) mainly killing only Jewish men are the Bihać Jews, on whom virtually no information seems available. I. Goldstein (2001, 415), in his sole reference to the town, points out that the birth registries were destroyed in fighting, and hence it is difficult to gauge the losses of the Jewish community. However, several sources corroborate that all Jews, including women and children, were expelled from the town on 24 June to Kulen Vakuf, where they were interned (Zločini nos. 87, 90, 102, 103, 110, 116, 121). Given the timing, it seems plausible that they were transferred to Gospić, except for the fact that there is

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13 These figures were obtained from the list of identified victims of Gospić-Velebit-Pag Camps, available online at http://jadovno.com/imenicni-popis/#.WuMfd8i-lxh.
to date no record of any Bihać Jews being killed there, and that there were comparatively few deportations generally to Gospić from this area (Koljanin 2015; Zatezalo 2007), where local killing sites took precedence.

So there are two unique possibilities with the Bihać Jews. Firstly, that they were killed in or near Kulen Vakuf (or at Garavice at the edge of Bihać, though it would seem pointless to bring them back there with pits around Kulen Vakuf available); in either case, it was perhaps the only mass killing of Jews (not counting executions) in the NDH outside a camp. Secondly, even if deported to Gospić, where the genders were separated—and though one would need to clarify if any female Bihać Jews survived (virtually no male Jews survived)—this may have been the first complete killing of a Jewish community in the NDH. Hence it would also be an early example upholding H1 regarding Jews—though as Jews overall had a very evenly distributed death toll across age and gender, H1 is upheld with them, anyway, by the end of 1943 (Dulić 2015b).

A final interesting point on non-Serbs in the Gospić-Velebit-Pag camps is that though only one Roma victim has been identified by name, I have found one source that could suggest otherwise. A gendarme report from August mentions that on the night of 10-11, some Italian troops in Perušić attempted to help prisoners escape, amongst whom were some “Gypsy women”14 (Zločini no. 223). As Perušić is next to Gospić and would see some of the most intense killings in its environs (see below), there is little doubt that prisoners held in this town at this time—the zenith of the camps—would have been headed for sinkholes or internment within Gospić-Velebit-Pag. Hence, preliminary steps towards the Porajmos within the NDH—in this case, if correct, not limited to men, though still of a sporadic level and very early also for Europe generally—may have occurred in Lika before even the mobile killings of Roma in December, in Banija, as mentioned by S. Goldstein (2013).

The Role of the Camps in Annihilating Lika’s Serbs

The camps were not only national level centres of “institutionalized destruction”, but also had a local function. From late June until late July, the camps were used as an

14 “Ciganke”, conceivably a derogatory term for Serbs, but this would be highly uncharacteristic for a gendarme report, and in any case “Vlach” was a preferred derogatory term (Bartulin 2014).
institutionalization of the policy towards Lika’s Serbs, intended to destroy the community elites (decapitation). Groups of males, and only occasionally women (though the males included young boys, not part of the elites), were sent to Gospić and into the camps from across the region.

By far the largest number of males was from Gospić and Perušić and the villages around them, the area in which the camps were located, numbering over a thousand. A middle-ranging number of men were brought from Korenica/Plitvice (499), while only smaller numbers from Otočac (197), Gračac (49), Donji Lapac (36), Brinje (15)15. From Eastern Lika, those municipalities within Krbava-Psat County, there were fewer arrivals, which can perhaps be explained by the fact that much of the population from Plitvice had been expelled, while many of the men in that area had already fled. The lower numbers may also be related to the County authorities of Krbava-Psat in Bihać: those in Lika-Gacka, whose commissioner’s office was in Gospić and partly responsible for the camps as well as personally close to the elites running the camps, would naturally be more inclined to use the camp system. Those in Eastern Lika preferred localized killing sites as discussed.

Overall, in Western Lika, the deportations show a widening of the net, so to speak, with larger numbers of regular villagers (seljací) now being arrested, and some male children sent into the camps, showing a shift away from prominent persons, military personnel and clergy towards the male population more generally, corroborating H1. Though the policy of targeting prominent men could be possibly framed in light of Kalyvas’ (2006) spatial model, in that one could conceivably define it as selective violence against potential insurgents, it seems that this widening of scope, as well as the policy at the camp to kill men instead of holding them as hostages (Zatezalo 2007), in order to pre-empt insurgency (like with the Jews of Serbia [Manošek 2007]), suggests a “nationalizing” policy rather than a strategic one, even if the rebellion in Herzegovina and rumblings of such in Lika may have been used as pretext.

Women from Lika were deported less often. For example, only five were deported from Gračac, eleven from Otočac, fourteen from Korenica, and none from Donji Lapac or Brinje. Though some women from Gospić and Perušić were sent into the system’s entry point at Gospić, where many were subjected to rape (Zatezalo

15All figures on deportations were also obtained from the database of identified victims of the camps: see n.13.
2007), they too were far fewer than men. However, it is with the targeting of women from the Perušić area that we start to see a de-gendering of violence again, as well as a spreading out of the Gospić killing operation to include localized killing sites in Lika.

On 15 July, Ustaše in Perušić began a de-gendered killing operation against the Orthodox villages around the town. This is also the point at which the general killing operation of Gospić-Velebit-Pag, under Luburić’s ultimate command, began to expand out into Lika, encompassing established village-level killing sites. On this day, local Ustaše killed forty-seven Serbs, including many women, from the village of Janjačka Kosa, at the neighbouring village of Konjsko Brdo, burying them in a mass grave: most of the women were villagers, and there were also two infants at least killed (Zatezalo 2005, 354). There was also another local killing site nearby, the Sveti Ana sinkhole in Gornji Kosinj, used since May (Zatezalo 2005, 337).

In any case, this event, before insurgency had spread into the region, shows a de-gendering of violence on a local level, hence a shift away from deportations of men to be killed at the camps, towards increasing gender-neutral and age-neutral killings, in line with H1. Though the massive localized killings that would soon engulf the entire region can be said to be a reaction to the rebellion that would begin on 27 July, these earlier killings around Perušić show, like the massacres in early July and the second massacre of girls at Bubanj on 12 July, that even if the rebellion had not happened, the Ustaše killing operation, already basically targeting all men, was spreading anyway to target women and children in line with H1—and indeed it is the beginning of that process that was one of the factors spurring the rebellion. This massacre happened in the context of two other local massacres, each killing forty-two Serb men, on 17 July at Janjačka Kosa, and on 20 July at Križanovo Brdo, also near Perušić (Zatezalo 2005, 354).

The brazen use of local killing sites near victims’ villages, when deportation to the nearby Gospić camp was possible, shows a stepping-up of the killing process, an attempt to entrap more people more quickly, a realization that Western Lika might really be cleansed of Serbs. This seems to be in line with H3, as clearly violence is becoming more widespread geographically, correlating increasingly with Serb settlement patterns and, as Dulić and Hall (2014) argue, hitting hardest the Serbs in
areas of Croat majority (though a final answer to this, which concerns magnitude, would depend on an analysis of demographic losses, beyond my scope).

This widening net of local killing centres around Lika was not limited to Perušić. On 10 July, Bihać Ustaše raided the village of Derigruz just outside Ličko Petrovo Selo arresting seven men, who were tortured in Bihać and killed at Garavice (AJ 110-588-63). On 15 July as well, some Bosnian Ustaše stationed in Gračac had raided the nearby village of Grab, killing two women and looting and burning (Zbornik V. 1, no. 230). More significantly, in mid-July and in consort with the Perušić Ustaše, they killed 130 civilian Serbs, including women and children (Zatezalo 2005, 357). There are several other sinkholes around Gračac and Perušić that Zatezalo lists as killing sites, including the “Jamurka jama” near Gračac into which around 600 Serbs were thrown (2005, 353). These pits were already being used by Gračac Ustaše in their increasingly large localised killings. Around the same time, mid-July, Ustaše killed forty Serbs from Medak outside the village (Zatezalo 2005, 353).

Besides continuing around Perušić with a further massacre of ten women and children at Krš on 26 July (Zatezalo 2005, 354), the large-scale killing operations begun by Luburić continued in South-Eastern Lika, with for example fifteen Serbs killed at Dobroselo on 26 July. Koljanin (2015) has argued convincingly that the fanaticism of local Ustaše and presence of many established local killing sites, explains the relatively low number of deportees from the Donji Lapac-Kulen Vakuf area. I would add that it also reflects the fact that Krbava-Psat was a County that had developed its own extermination system, for example the immense killing site at Garavice near Bihać: Koljanin (2015) does not consider the difference in jurisdiction.

There are a number of pits listed by Zatezalo (2005) into which people were thrown, particularly around Korenica, but with little data currently available. Hence, it seems that localized killings in this area before the rebellion were indeed being undertaken by local “wild Ustaše” in a more ad hoc and disorderly way, but, as we see with the two available examples (Dobroselo, and the rape and murder of girls on 12 July), they were of a highly age- and gender-neutral nature, continuing Luburić’s work in line with H1, and so part of the spatially-widening process that seems to support H3.
Bergholz gives another example, explaining that under Matijević’s command, the Kulen Vakuf Ustaše began, in early July, to transport Serb victims they arrested in and around the town to the Boričevac pit: this was due to resistance from local Muslims over the killings, hence a desire to move the killings out their sight (they had previously used a site near the Orthodox Church in Kulen Vakuf) (2010, 81-82). Hundreds of Serbs from the Una river area were killed by Matijević and his men through July (Zločini no. 373).

So it seems that broadly speaking, Western Lika’s Serbs were subjected to a elite-managed and organized operation involving deportation to Gospić, which initially continued “decapitation” though on an institutionalized level, but was starting to encompass women, elderly and children by mid-July, in line with H1, and to increase the spatial distribution of violence by encompassing numerous smaller killings sites, in line with H3’s prediction on this “nationalizing” actor. All this as Eastern Lika, under a different jurisdiction (Krbava-Psat), was left in the hands of local “wild Ustaše” who used local killing sites and were increasingly indiscriminate and widespread regarding their victims and locations, following the example Luburić had set at Suvaja, likewise corroborating H1 and H3.

Chapter Five: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

The Srb Uprising

Discussion of happenings around Donji Lapac and Kulen Vakuf during this time is key, as this is where the rebellion started, known as the Srb Uprising (Ustanak u Srbu), centring on the village of Srb, South-Eastern Lika, on 27 July.

Though the Communist-era historiography focused on Srb on 27 July, Hoare (2006, 33) points out that the earliest spark occurred the day before in Western Bosnia, near Drvar, when a Domobran officer was killed in an ambush by three communist-inclined men. The Drvar communists were extremely strong, as the area had some light industry: in the previous weeks, local communists had begun to infiltrate and organize amongst both local Serbs and refugees sent to the area from
Plitvice and elsewhere (S. Goldstein 2013, 152-153; Hoare 2006). In response to Ustaše reprisals that started on 26 July after the ambush, a simultaneous process of a generalized spontaneous revolt by masses of self-defending Serbs, particularly the groups of men hiding in the forests, many of whom were bereaved, hysterical and embittered, and who were semi-organized around local leaders and former soldiers, and an organized uprising by the Drvar communists, began (Bergholz 2010; Hoare 2006).

On 27 July, a group of semi-organized Serb men stormed Martin Brod, a village on the Una, quickly overrunning the gendarme station at the Rmanj Monastery (Zbornik 5.1. br. 95): on the same day, the Lika village of Srb was overrun in a similar manner, while the gendarme station at Otrić was overrun by rebels from Zrmanje (Zbornik V.1, no. 101). Drvar itself also fell on 27 July, the very first town in Yugoslavia to be liberated; Donji Lapac followed, falling on 30 July (Bergholz 2010). With rebellion spreading West, Gračac was surrounded by 28 July (though the Italians and Domobrani would soon relieve it), and Udbina by 2 August (Zbornik V.1, no. 114), the day on which Boričevac, which had held out, fell (Bergholz 2010, 95).

Though the KPJ’s\textsuperscript{16} leadership was stronger in the area of Drvar, in the areas in the Una valleys and South-Eastern Lika it is more difficult to gauge who, if anybody, was in control. The first order from the KPJ’s Regional Command for Lika from 16 August (Zbornik V.1, no. 10) demonstrates that by then the Communists had consolidated themselves as the main faction in the leadership of the increasingly-organised insurgents; however, this was a few weeks after the beginning of the rebellion. In its first days in late July, it was more a spontaneous, largely ethnic rebellion consisting of attacks by masses of Serb men, many armed only with farm implements such as scythes, from the forests towards Ustaše and gendarme posts and Croat villages: these were usually quickly overrun by sheer force of numbers and will, and the element of surprise (Bergholz 2010). Bergholz (2010) has pointed out that whatever organization there was, it consisted of groups of men from the same villages banding together, and hence whether one followed a nominally Četnik or nominally Communist leader depended more on where one was from, or on family ties, or simply where one found oneself.

\textsuperscript{16} Communist Party of Yugoslavia.
For example, the communists Gojko Polovina (the future leader of the Lika Partisans) and Đoko Jovanić were dominant amongst the men of Suvaja; Rađenović, a Četnik leader and prominent member of the Yugoslav Radical Union who had previously represented the village, was the main leader amongst the men of Srb (Bergholz 2010; Jareb 2011). In any case, the leadership at this stage mattered less as, with the exception of Drvar, it was not established in any sense of a coordinated military-political command, and even insofar as it was, nominally Communist and nominally Četnik units cooperated for now (Bergholz 2010). In the first weeks, pushing the Ustaše out of South-Western Krbava-Psat County was the objective, and it was not politics but the emotions of the rank-and-file that seem to have largely dictated what happened on the ground. Dulić also cites external pressure (from Britain and the Soviet Union) for the creation of united front as a factor influencing co-operation (2005, 107).

The Communists, later in August as rebellion spread through Lika, installed leadership of most of these village groups, creating geographically based, communist-led Partisan units that were increasingly centralized under the KPJ (Zbornik V.1, no. 10). Četnik17 factions, late in 1941, started to organize around Srb into the “Kralj Petar” (King Peter) Brigade (Zbornik V.2, no. 59), under Italian patronage and more closely linked to the insurgents to the South in Dalmatia, amongst whom the Četniks had taken control, led by Dujić, an Orthodox Priest (Popović, Lolić and Latas 1988). However, in summer and autumn these distinctions mattered little amongst the rank-and-file, for whom the rebellion was firstly a battle for survival against Ustaše rule, but also seems for many to have been a chance for revenge, the latter compatible to an extent with Kalyvas’ arguments on the “privatization of politics” (2006, 330-363).

The gendarme report on the uprising says that Martin Brod and Rmanj were captured “by Četniks carrying a red flag” (Zbornik V.1, no 95), which although reflecting the common Ustaše trope of equating Communists and Serbian nationalists (not dissimilar to the anti-Semitic equation of Zionism, Communism and Capitalism), in this case may actually be somewhat true.

17 “Četniks” broadly refers to Serbian Nationalist, anti-Communist resistance fighters, though they increasingly collaborated first with the Italians and later with the Germans and even Ustaše. In Western Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro from late 1941, an official Četnik Movement, known as the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, was led by Mihailović, which did not initially include those in Lika, led by Dujić, who nevertheless were known as Četniks (Dulić 2005, 102-121; Popović, Lolić and Latas 1988).
Revenge? The Insurgency in South-Eastern Lika

As the rebels overran the entire Donji Lapac and Drvar regions in one week, there were atrocities committed, and though they pale in comparison to those of the Ustaše before, during and after, they provide an interesting theoretical angle on mass killings in the area. The largest happened on the very first day, in Trubar just outside Srb on the Bosnian side of the border, where according to Dizdar and Sobolevski 200 Catholic pilgrims were killed along with the priest leading them, Nestor, while an unclear number of Muslims were also killed in and around Drvar (1999, 114-119). The following day, the village of Brotnja in South-Eastern Lika, next to Suvaja, was overrun, and in the process of looting and burning the village, thirty-seven Croats were killed, mostly civilians (Dizdar and Sobolevski 1999, 116-117). The close proximity of Brotnja to Suvaja, where the worst atrocity against Serbs had occurred, suggests revenge as a particularly strong motivation.

On 2 August, Boričevac, the centre of the Ustaše in South-Eastern Lika, was captured, having held out, surrounded, for a week. The previous night, the NDH authorities in the town had ordered an evacuation, and at least 1,000 Croats fled in a column that reached Kulen Vakuf: the next day insurgents entered the village and looted and flattened it, and it seems that several elderly Croats who had remained behind were murdered (Bergholz 2010, 94-96).

On 8 August two more Catholic villages on the Bosnian side, Vrtoče and Krnjeuša, were ransacked having been simultaneously surprise-attacked (similar to Luburić’s own tactic) by Lika rebels who had trekked from Boričevac and divided into two groups, and as many as 400 Croats may have been killed (Bergholz 2010, 97-98). In Vrtoče, Matijević’s home village, they murdered his parents and most of his extended family, to which he responded by killing dozens of Serbs in Kulen Vakuf; in Krnjeuša, they killed the Catholic priest by burning the Church with him inside, and killed many elderly and children (Bergholz 2010, 97-98).

On one hand, this string of insurgent atrocities seems to corroborate H1’s and Kalyvas’ (2006) prediction that insurgent violence in an incumbent-controlled area is more likely to be indiscriminate: indeed, one could postulate that information failure was a factor, as they may have been unable to identify who the actual Ustaše were, or to apprehend any of them. However, this must be balanced with the selective nature of the attacks on Martin Brod, Srb and Zrmanje, Serb majority villages where there
was no indiscriminate violence observed, showing an ethnic nature to the indiscriminate cases.

One should also be careful not to underestimate the emotional side: as Bergholz (2010) illustrates, many of the rank-and-file insurgents were livid with anger, or deranged by bereavement, and wanted nothing more than revenge, and the use of Ustaše-like tactics would seem to confirm revenge as motivation (cf. following section).

The problem with the argument of information failure in these cases is that the desire for revenge was not necessarily limited in theory to the actual Ustaše: Bergholz argues that the Bihać and Lika Ustaše had deliberately created a situation of total ethnic polarization, hence some insurgents may not have necessarily preferred to kill actual Ustaše only, but wished to take revenge on the entire Catholic and Muslim population, as people were now thinking in terms of ethnic collectives (2010, 102-103).

Figure 4: South-Eastern Lika and the Kulen Vakuf area
Unsanctioned Massacre: The Anti-Muslim Pogrom at Kulen Vakuf

This logic of collective reprisals is particularly true with the extraordinarily violent massacre of more than 1,000 Muslims, and a small number of Catholics, in and around Kulen Vakuf in early September: the perpetrators were under Partisan command, by now well-established, part of the Drvar Brigade, whose members included refugees from the Plitvice and Donji Lapac areas (Bergholz 2010, 2016; S. Goldstein 2013, 151-155). The town had been the centre of a pocket of NDH-controlled territory with a strong Domobran garrison under Veber who had managed to hold out through August despite the attempt to relieve the enclave from Gračac ending disastrously with 200 dead Domobrani ambushed at Boričevac (Zbornik V. 1, no. 16; Zbornik Xiii. no. 136). The pocket had become a safe area for Catholic and Muslim refugees from Eastern Lika and North-Western Bosnia (Bergholz 2010).

On 26 August the Croat refugees from Boričevac, who had been in Kulen Vakuf for weeks, formed a column and slipped out to Bihać (Bergholz 2010, 106). However, on 4 September a Partisan assault began on the enclave, with Ćuković falling: immediately insurgents started killing fleeing Muslims, a pattern that was repeated as they moved further into the enclave over the following days (Bergholz 2010). On 6 September, more than 5,000 refugees who had gathered in the centre of Kulen Vakuf headed for Bihać under Domobrani guard, with Veber having decided to abandon the town: it came under heavy repeated ambushes, and the column was broken up. Insurgents immediately began executing groups of refugees left behind, raping women, throwing infants into the Una waterfalls, and throwing many victims into the “Golubnjača” sinkhole (another sinkhole by the same name was used by Ustaše in Plitvice: see following section) (Bergholz 2010). Hence, there is an anomaly regarding H2: insurgent indiscriminate violence increased as control increased, initially at least.

Bergholz (2010) argues that it was due to divergence between the Communist commanders and the rank and file, many of whom were seeking revenge, and/or were Serbian nationalists. Though Bergholz stresses that individual Communist leaders, especially Polovina, attempted to stop the massacres and did save Muslims, many rank-and-file insurgents were not only seeking revenge but were in fact highly bigoted against Muslims, frequently taunting their victims with anti-Muslim slurs and
forcing them to sing Četnik songs, while Četnik-inclined leaders commanding equal respect, such as Pero Dijlas, issued counter-orders to kill Muslims (2010, 139-142).

Just as the level of anti-Orthodox bigotry amongst the Catholic and Muslim populations should not be underestimated, neither too should the level of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim feelings amongst the Serb peasantry, including those under nominally Communist command. Offensive terms such as “Turks” (used to depict Muslims as foreign, with similar connotations to “Vlach”) and “Balija” (a highly derogative term for Bosniaks) were commonly used not only by Četniks but also by Serb Partisans (Bergholz 2010, 2016; Hoare 2014). As Mahmutčehajić (2017) discusses, bigotry against Slavic Muslims (the descendants of Christian Slavs who had converted under the Turks, ergo “native” Europeans and not ethnic Turks) bears many similarities to anti-Semitism. Depictions as traitors/apostates who had abandoned Orthodoxy (cf. Dulić 2005, 109-118), servers of imperialism, associations with capitalism (like Jews Muslims were seen as better off), in short an “internal other” like the Jews, were common (Mahmutčehajić 2017; cf. Hoare 2014). The rebirth of Serbia/Montenegro was dependent on solving the question of this internal other (Mahmutčehajić 2017), very similar to the German “redemptive anti-Semitism” discussed by Friedländer (2007, 73-112).

A commonality identified by many who have studied Serbian anti-Muslim tropes is also associated with the rural-urban divide, with Serbs historically being more rural, Muslims more associated with towns, rural Muslims with the landowning class. This has sometimes been called “urbicide” (see Carmichael 2013). Bergholz gives an example that could hint at this: Jovanić, a Communist leader, after the fall of Kulen Vakuf, had, surrounded by his peasant men, sarcastically commented on the “real Bosnian houses, clean and orderly” (2010, 121). This long-term social observation, as well as the more immediate context of persecution, could be linked to MacDonald’s (2009) rubric of subaltern genocide and the Serbs, though it would be much more immediate than the examples (mainly Srebrenica) given by MacDonald.

With Kulen Vakuf, and the above-discussed massacres of Croats, there is an interesting space for theoretical elaboration. With the Hypotheses in mind, the trickiest aspect is assessing intent. Despite the prevalence of bigotry, there is clear evidence that the atrocities, especially Kulen Vakuf, went against command’s wishes (Bergholz 2010). This cannot thus be described “nationalizing” war as the latter
denotes policy and elite acquiescence: even if some of the more ideological motivations of the Četnik-inclined factions may have been broadly in the same family as the Ustaše, ethnic massacres were not the policy of the Communist command.

Revenge is clearly a part of rank-and-file intent, especially with the earlier massacres of Croats in late July and early August, and with Kulen Vakuf, with all the villages having had strong groups of Ustaše and most of the perpetrators having lost family (Bergholz 2010). Kalyvas gives an insightful discussion of revenge’s significance as a motivation of violence, arguing that it is a highly personalized motivation—i.e., afflicting those who themselves have suffered—but which can often be non-selective regarding its choice of victim, as it causes one lash out, so to speak (2006, 58-61). Hence, it is not a huge leap to say that revenge can take ethnic forms in a situation of total ethnic polarization, especially if the perpetrators of revenge have themselves lost family to ethnic massacre, and the use of sinkholes, as the Ustaše had used, could reflect the logic of revenge in the sense of retaliating in kind (though the uses of pits also functioned as a practical disposal measure). Revenge is an example of where people do not exercise violence with cost-benefit considerations in mind (Kalyvas 2006, 58-61).

In terms of systematics of insurgent atrocities, however, they remained at what Dulić would classify as incidental or at most sporadic levels (2005, 23), with one burst in the first week of the uprising (July-August), followed by Kulen Vakuf a month later, before ceasing as a phenomenon for the duration of 1941. The intent level regarding the Catholic-Muslim population would at best be selective killing, but I think given that this intent level would refer to rank-and-file rather than commanders it would be safer to define intent as strategic, as the commanders wished to capture territory and had no “nationalizing” program. Thus the intensification of killing after assertion of control problematizes H2.

So the difficulty is in the intent, the why. Information failure is problematic due to the scale of killing, especially at Kulen Vakuf, where they could not possibly have been looking for Ustaše alone, and where the level of violence cannot be linked to the achievement of control which was largely secure once the largest killings in Kulen Vakuf started (Bergholz 2010). Hence, the best way to categorize Kulen Vakuf and the other insurgent atrocities is probably as “pogroms”, implying brevity and outburst (see Mann 2005, 15), unsanctioned in this case unlike the Ustaše sanctioned
massacres (Kelman 1973). Dulić has indeed found that in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Četnik atrocities were more quickly indiscriminate when they happened, but happened less systematically due in part to the lack of state apparatus (2005, 301-310). Though these cases lack the same official nationalizing intent as the Četniks considered by Dulić (2005), it says something about the process of insurgent killings, more similar to ransack or pogrom spurred by multiple rank and file intents.

Draining the Ethnic Sea: The Ustaše Response to Insurgency

The Ustaše responded, as S. Goldstein puts it, “with Luburić-style reprisals” (2013, 158), though through the following section on the Ustaše response to insurgency it is important to remember that Kulen Vakuf, the most serious insurgent atrocity, came in September after the bloodiest period of Ustaše rule which follows. These genocidal reprisals were again directly sanctioned by Budak, who on 28 July made another speech, this time in Kosinj, one of the epicentres of localised massacres, in which he lamented the continued existence of Serbs (Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 136). Another speech may have been made by Budak in Gospić on July 22, in which he mooted the “one third” policy of respectively killing, expelling and converting Serbs, though the extent to which this was actually a policy rather than dialogue is dubious (see Dulić 2005, 100): we see the extent to which the Ustaše’s were sanctioned policies of massacre (see Kelman 1973).

What followed was a new assault on the Korenica-Plitvice area. This was the Serb majority area to the immediate North of the Donji Lapac area, falling to the insurgents. Whereas the last assault on Plitvice Lakes in late June had been one of non-lethal ethnic cleansing of the area immediately in Plitvice Lakes, this time the Ustaše implemented massive gender-neutral, age-neutral killings of the Serb inhabitants of the villages to the immediate South and East of Plitvice. Already on 26 July, they had arrested hundreds of Serbs of all genders from Ljubovo and Bunić and imprisoned them in the basement of the police station in Bunić (Zatezalo 2005, 321-325).

This hostage-taking had a possible pre-emptive logic, in that these two Serb villages, whose inhabitants were immediately interned on the same day as rebellious actions began in Drvar, lie on the road between Korenica and Gospić: if the rebellion
were to spread there, and to the neighbouring Serb villages, it could cause the fall of Korenica and encircle Gospić. Eighty of the hostages were tortured and murdered in the basement, while the rest were sent to Korenica, where they were held in the “veliki Magazin”, already used as a transit centre for prisoners sent to Gospić, and in the courthouse (Zatezalo 2005, 321-325). As massive arrests of Serbs by Korenica Ustaše continued in and around the town, with the prisoners being sent into the holding centres, mass killing started. Between Bunić and Korenica, sixty-four Serbs were killed by house-burning (Zatezalo 2005, 355).

On 27 July, Bihać Ustaše entered the village of Ličko Petrovo Selo, lying on the Bosnian border between Plitvice and the city, from where seven men from the outlying hamlet of Derigruz had already been killed at Garavice on 10 July (AJ 110-588-63). Dozens of men, many of them elderly, were immediately arrested and taken to the Delić sinkhole in Zavalje, outside Bihać, and killed (AJ 110-588-64; 110-588-66). On 27 and 28 July, a total of 862 Serbs were killed at this pit, including a further eighty-two from Miljinovac, and more from other Serb hamlets North of Donji Lapac, rounded up just before the town’s capture (Zatezalo 2005, 340). Many of these victims were women and children. During the same time, another group of Serbs from Birovača, just North of Donji Lapac, were killed at a pit outside Cazin (Zatezalo 2005, 340).

Ličko Petrovo Selo, which lost more inhabitants at Zavalje in the following days, also had its Orthodox Church destroyed (Zločini no. 358), a favourite tactic of Bihać Ustaše (Bergholz 2010, 67-68), reflecting the under-reported but common Ustaše policy of what Üngör (2015) calls material cultural genocide, erasure of the target group’s material heritage, (parallel with their simultaneous policy of non-material cultural genocide [Üngör 2015], for example the ban of the Cyrillic alphabet, conversions, and so on).

On the last day of July and first day of August, the Korenica Ustaše outdid their comrades in Bihać, systematically exterminating the more than 1,000 Serbs, at least half women and children, they had arrested around Korenica over the previous days. The site chosen for their hostage extermination was the “Golubnjača jama” in Prijeboj, Plitvice Lakes. On 31 July they killed the 119 civilians, mostly women and children, they had arrested in Ljubovo on 26 July, and over the following days they exterminated 900 more prisoners arrested around Korenica (Zatezalo 2005, 340).
To the West, brutal reprisals started too. The first were in the Ustaše-controlled, and most threatened, districts to the immediate West of Donji Lapac, namely Gračac, Lovinac and Udbina. Both of these areas had radical groups of Ustaše. In Gračac, the local Ustaše under the control now of Tiljak, who had already been arresting and massacring, began mass arrests also on 27 July (AJ 110-264-861). Between 27 July and 1 August, perhaps 700 Serbs from within the surrounded enclave of Gračac were arrested and held in the Ustaše station in the town, where torture and rape, including of the elderly, were endemic (AJ 110-264-861). Most of these were led to the Tučić (c. 500 victims) or Ponori (c.220) sinkholes, and murdered (Zatezalo 2005, 339). These had already been used as killing sites before, though the largest number of victims was killed at the end of July and early August.

During the same period, on 29 July-2 August, the Lovinac Ustaše just to the North exterminated the remaining Serb inhabitants of the hamlet of Gnjatovići, which they had already targeted twice, killing now 125 out of 150 of the inhabitants, and settling Croats in their homes (Zatezalo 2005, 357), and during the same period, killed fifty-seven Serb civilians at Krivak near Sveti Rok on 29 and on 31, and eighty villagers at Gornja Ploča (Zatezalo 2005, 357). While near Udbina, which was likewise surrounded, dozens of Serbs from the hamlets around the town were killed on 1 August at Pločanski Klanac (Zatezalo 2005, 356).

August 2, St Elijah’s Day (Ilindan), another day of religious significance for Orthodox and Catholics, was the bloodiest single day, with eight massacres of Serbs across Lika. Particularly important is that village-massacres were now beginning in the Gospić area, which to date had seen more orderly persecution through deportation into the camps. These had already begun on 1 August when the Ustaše from the town killed forty-nine Serbs in Lipe, outside Gospić (Zatezalo 2005, 352). On the following day, there were six gender-neutral massacres of Serbs in the villages around Gospić and Perušić (at Smiljan [Tesla’s home village], Bogdanići, Zable, Široka Kula, Duboko, and Janjačka Kosa), as well as two in the enclaves of Udbina and Gračac.

Particularly interesting is the trick that was played as part of many of these massacres on 2 August, for example those at Štikada (Gračac/Lovinac), Široka Kula (Gospić) Duboko (Perušić) and Udbina. This was related to a recent (30 July) Decree regarding conversions to Catholicism (Zločini no. 169). Supposedly an attempt to respond to mounting Italian and German accusations that the spread of rebellions in
Herzegovina and Lika was due to the Ustaše’s policy (see Goldstein 2013), it postulated that peasants (intelligentsia were still excluded) would be allowed to convert to Catholicism, and thus become Croats, provided they received a certificate from the local Ustaše authorities testifying that their “conduct had been appropriate” (Zločini no. 169). In theory this constituted a shift away from the continuous and even institutionalized lethal persecution of Serbs, without discrimination of age and gender, to the idea of forced assimilation.

However, what happened in practice in Lika and across the state was that those who arrived for conversion were massacred. This shows that there was an explicit rejection by Ustaše of the idea of assimilation, and that the gap between theory and practice was complete, with the latter constituting a continuous policy of gender- and age-neutral, increasingly widespread ethnic massacres, corroborating H1 and H3.

The choice of Ilindan, on one hand was due to timing, but has nevertheless a symbolic meaning that is under-considered even by detailed studies of the conversion campaign (such as Biondich 2005). Elijah is firstly the patron saint of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims observe his Saints day. Secondly, Elijah is associated with John the Baptist, believed to be his incarnation, who preached forgiveness and, of course, baptised, an association that may not be incidental.

These massacres under the pretext of conversion bring up perhaps the most controversial aspect of the NDH, the role of the Catholic Clergy. The best-documented example of this in the case of Lika is of the Catholic parish priest of Gračac, Morber, apparently a member of the Kulturbund and thus likely a Nazi supporter, who apparently had helped lure more than 200 Serbs from the village of Štikada and the surrounding hamlets to the marsh in the centre of the village where the conversion ceremony, he promised, would be carried out (Dokumenti, 144). Sixty Serbs from the nearby hamlet of Podkosa had already been killed nearby the day before, but nevertheless many, including women and children, arrived for conversion the following day, where they were killed mostly with hammers and bayonets, by Ustaše under the command of Ivezić, the head of the Štikada’s “wild Ustaše” (Aj 110-276-164; Zatezalo 2005, 339). Though many of the killers were from Gospić and Perušić, several were also from Gudure, the mostly Catholic part of Štikada.
The level of intimacy in this and other killings must have been enormous, as Bergholz (2010) has also commented. These were truly neighbourly massacres: Lang (2010) has argued that the common idea of “dehumanization” is misguided when considering rank-and-file perpetrators, for whom he claims the experience is ultra-human, related to power, which seems a strong rubric in this case where perpetrator and victim were from the same village. Building on this, one could add Kallis’ (2007) idea of the carnivalesque: in situations of such massive social violence, a new reality takes hold which functions as an unlimited licence for previously-suppressed predispositions.

As well as the divergence between assimilationist theory and genocidal practice, another key fact relating to this period following the July 30 Decree (Zločini 169) is pointed out by Bartulin (2014, 212), namely, that two areas, one of which was Krbava-Psat, were excepted even in theory from the policy of assimilation. Krbava-Psat’s local authorities, with a track record of mass killing, were empowered to act as they saw fit—“What this essentially meant was that, in the above strategically important areas (which represented a sort of Serbian ‘cordon’), the solution to the ‘Serb problem’ would be expedited through the final means (i.e. deportation and extermination)” (Bartulin 2014, 212). This is a highly important exemption, as it constitutes a direct sanctioning by the elite of the massacres on-going in the strategic Krbava-Psat County, at Prijeboj, Zavalje and Garavice.

Through August, the Ustaše massacres did not abate. Despite the reality that it was igniting the rebellion it was suppressing (i.e. cost of violence-exertion logically speaking was outweighing benefit), which had reached the southern edge of Gospić by 4 August, the Ustaše continued to massacre Serbs within the areas they controlled, strongly corroborating H1 and H3. Besides the massacres already mentioned on 1-2 August, there were dozens more in the first two weeks of the month.

From 2 August the Gospić Ustaše’s reprisals focused on the East, linking up with the Korenica Ustaše by killing 222 Serbs mostly by burning, around Lički Osik, Klenovac and Široka Kula (Zatezalo 2005, 353) (the Korenica Ustaše had already targeted the next cluster of villages to the East along the same road, Bunić and Ljubovo). One of the massacres in this area at this time, at Kuzmanovića where 160 were killed, was personally directed by Frković, Commissioner of Lika-Gacka County (Zatezalo 2005, 354).
In the following days, Ustaša massacres accelerated. On 3 August, there were massacres much further to the Croat-majority North-West, with dozens of villagers from Švica and Goriči, near Otočac, killed at Sinjal (Zatezalo 2005, 356), showing how reprisals were not limited to immediately threatened areas, as also shown especially by the on-going immense massacres in Kordun and Banija, further away regions where the rebellion had not reached, for example at Grabovac (S. Goldstein 2013; Zatezalo 2005), and seeming to corroborate H3 and Dulić and Hall’s (2014) arguments.

On 3 August the Partisans advanced South of Gospić capturing Divoselo, killing seven Ustaše (Zbornik V.1, no. 26), and on 5 August four Ustaše, including the commander in Medak, were killed in an ambush at Počitelj (Zbornik V.1, no. 26), which the insurgents seized and held along with Ribnik. On the same day, eleven Ustaše and one Italian were killed in an attack on the gendarme station in Medak (Zbornik V.1, no. 26).

The Ustaše responded, not surprisingly, by slaughtering any of the Serb inhabitants of the villages South of Gospić they could lay their hands on. From 2-4 August, twenty-five villagers were killed in Ostrvica, and on 3 August seventy-five villagers from the same village were killed on a hiking trail near Lički Osik, and another eighteen killed in Smiljansko Polje to the North on 4 August (Zatezalo 2005, 353). On 5 August, the Ustaše pushed back and retook Divoselo, immediately burning seventeen villagers alive in their houses (AJ 110-128-226; Zatezalo 2005, 352). Most of the villagers fled, but later the same day, Ustaše surrounded a large group of refugees from Divoselo on the Western slope of Mount Velebit, at an area known as “Alanak”. Lightly armed and under no illusions, they fought back, killing ten Ustaše, but were overpowered: the Ustaše immediately slaughtered seventy of the villagers, mostly unarmed women and children (Zatezalo 2005, 336; Zbornik V.1 no. 26). Showing the brutal logic of punishment and pretext for massacre, 5 August, the day of the Ustaše’s heaviest losses yet in Lika, saw the largest massacres yet. Not only did they kill seventy refugees at Alanak, but also forty-eight at Čitluk (Zatezalo 2005, 352) and 256, mostly refugees from Divoselo, Ornica and Čitluk at Kruskovača (Zatezalo 2005, 352).

In line with Kalyvas’ argument that indiscriminate violence is counterproductive regarding control (2006, 151-160), the Partisans were strengthened
by these attacks, as it seems they were Serbs’ only option for survival. In the following days they overran Gornja Ploča, and captured a string of villages to the South-West of Gospić (Mogorić, Vrebac, Zavode): while the Ustaše held onto Bilaj and Barlete, and Italians remained stationed in Medak (Zbornik V.1 no. 26).

With most of the area South of Gospić now either liberated or emptied of Serbs, Ustaše reprisals spread to the North and other areas outside insurgent control. It is also a vital point that during this entire early August period, deportations into the camp system of remaining Serbs in the town of Gospić especially, and elsewhere in Ustaše-controlled areas of Lika, were at the highest level they had yet been, with killings of Serbs living in Gospić even happening directly on the streets (Zatezalo 2005, 256-259).

On 6 August, Smiljan was yet again targeted, with fifty-one women killed at a locality know as “the valley of death” (Zatezalo 2005, 353) (most Serb men by now had fled or were dead, hence the continuation of killings of Serbs corroborates H1). On the same day, the Serb villages to the West of Perušić were again subjected to gender- and age-neutral massacres: on 6 August 286 civilians were massacred at Mlakva, mostly children and elderly (Zatezalo 2005, 286), and the following day the village of Krš was hit with six men killed near the village itself and forty-seven mostly women from Krš and Mlakva killed at Obljaj forest (Zatezalo 2005, 353).

Furthermore, on 8 August, sixty-six refugees from Divoselo and Ćitluk who had found refuge at Šibuljina on the coast below Velebit, were slaughtered inside the Orthodox Church in the village (Zatezalo 2005, 353). This village’s own Serb community had itself been mostly exterminated at the Jamina sinkhole above the village on Velebit, part of the Camp system (Zatezalo 2005, 337).

Even after the Ustaše began to retake territory to the South and East of Gospić, reprisals against the Perušić villages continued, with 190 Serbs from the area killed at the Nezdravka sinkhole in Donji Kosinj on 10 August (Zatezalo 2005, 337), Ustaše actions in Perušić, a securely controlled area, thus strongly corroborating H3, and another thirty-two villagers burnt to death at Smiljansko Polje on the same day (Zatezalo 2005, 353).

In the second week of August, NDH forces, supported by the Italians, attempted to counterattack again: the Partisans held the line at Gornja Ploča, inflicting heavy casualties on the NDH forces who wished to clear the pass at the village, which
would remove insurgents from high ground overlooking the railway below, and relieve Udbina (Zbornik V.1, no.26 and 41). Though the Partisans initially held the line at Počitelj and Ribnik (Zbornik V.1, no.26 and 41) the Ustaše nevertheless retook Vrebac and Ostrvica, on 9-10 August and 15 August, respectively. On retaking Vrebac, having already killed eighty Partisans in combat, they massacred 300 civilians (Zločini no. 206), and on retaking Ostrvica massacred eighty-one civilians from the area (Zatezalo 2005, 353). Hence, re-establishing territorial control involved liquidating the Serb population, also in line with H1 and H3.

Furthermore, on 12 August, NDH forces in Udbina, in response to Partisan encirclement and losses in the area, attacked the village of Donji Mekinjar, a Serb settlement within the enclave, killing twenty unarmed Serbs, raping women and plundering the village (Zločini no. 208). Udbina itself had become a safe area for Croats fleeing the rebels from the surrounding Krbavsko Polje area (Zločini no. 256; Zbornik V.1 no. 114). Though it was protected from falling by a large Italian garrison, Udbina was completely cut off from the rest of the NDH, with no communications at all other than the post truck and humanitarian supplies that were brought in under armoured Italian escort (Zločini no. 256). At this point, the Italian relationship with the rebels was complicated, but they were not yet entirely fighting each other, and had a modus vivendi for the time being (see, for example, Zbornik V.1 no. 102), although the communist-led Partisans would soon start combat operations against them.

When considering the Ustaše response to insurgency, there appears to be corroboration of H1 and H3, as the violence executed by this actor pursuing “nationalizing” war in areas they still controlled massively increased in indiscriminate nature and in geographic spread, even as threats to control loomed. As for the motivations of this wave of killings, as argued above, one could combine Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay’s (2004) arguments on the idea of draining the sea—i.e., mass killings as a calculated strategy of responding to insurgency by targeting pro-insurgent populations, though without necessarily having an intent to change the ethnic structure—with “nationalizing” war. This is what Kiernan did with the case of East Timor, arguing that the extent to which Indonesian indiscriminate reprisal was systematic reached a point that could be called “genocidal counterinsurgency”,

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considering that the intent level was selective killing at least and based in a “nationalizing” program of denying separate East Timorese identity (2010).

This argument would be that the Ustaša’s response to ethnic insurgency was genocidal (gender- and age-neutral) massacres against the ethnic group represented by the insurgency, a simultaneous form of punishment, pre-emption and continuation of their “nationalizing” policy using insurgency as pretext by which to accelerate policies designed to change the ethnic structure to their group’s advantage (similar perhaps to the fate in 2017-2018 of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar). As to the question of why they persisted with policies which threw petrol on the fire of insurgency, besides perhaps wishing to provoke it in order to have a pretext for “nationalizing war”, one answer other than pre-emptive massacres and reprisal may be that they knew that their Axis patrons would bail them out, as the Germans had at Sanski Most, if a real threat materialized—and they were right. Ergo, it may not be the case as much as it would on the surface seem that the cost of massacres conducted in line with “nationalizing war”—strengthening insurgency—outweighed the benefit, the latter defined by Ustaša as their utopian vision of an ethnically pure state, given that the Ustaša had military guarantors.

The Transition of Control

On August 16, Mussolini ordered the occupation of “Zone A”, including all of Lika-Gacka, the area which Italy had right to reoccupy if security concerns required, under the Treaty of Rome which had consolidated the Croatian-Italian border: they also ordered all Croatian military forces to leave or disarm (Dulić 2005, 168-175; S. Goldstein 2013 276), though Croatian gendarmes remained in the area (Zbornik V.1, no. 158).

Though one should not be naïve about the Italians, who as a military responsible for horrific crimes in Ethiopia were motivated as much by a desire to control territory, extend Mussolini’s Balkan empire, as by humanitarian concerns (Dulić 2005, 168-175; S. Goldstein 2013, 276), it is true that there was now a massive drop in killings of civilians, with the latter being the exception rather than the rule, an exception which I explore in the following section. Though there was an increase in Partisan activity between mid-August and the end of the year, there was a massive
decrease in incumbent indiscriminate violence reprisals, with the presence of the Italian military being the key changed variable. Ergo, I define the Italians as an actor motivated by strategic concerns, in contrast to the Ustaše.

Though there was still one massive Ustaše atrocity that occurred as the Italian military began reoccupying the area, namely the liquidation of most of the remaining survivors at Gospić-Velebit-Pag, which most likely occurred on and around 18 August (S. Goldstein 2013, 276-285; Zatezalo 2007). This involved the murder of most of the remaining inmates at Jadovno. These victims included a great many Lika Serbs. The survivors, mostly from Pag, were sent on to Jasenovac where they became the first inmates of the next part of the NDH’s policy of institutionalized destruction, the largest camp in the Balkans (Zatezalo 2007).

Italian presence notwithstanding, there were also a handful of later Ustaše atrocities. For example, on 25-27 August, some “wild Ustaše” killed thirty Serbs in Smiljan, who had attempted to return to their homes as the Italians had encouraged (Zločini no. 255). Likewise, though the source is unclear on the date, there was one case in late August/early September of Serb civilians coming to Lovinac, believing the Italian presence made it safe, trying to get food from a Croatian aid convoy, but being massacred by local Ustaše in a possible trap similar to the conversion ceremonies (Zbornik XIII. 1, no. 136). Even as late as 27 October, three Serb brothers were murdered in Krš, a previous epicentre of localized killing: unusually, gendarmes were the perpetrators and the source claims “racial hatred” was the motivation (Zbornik XIII.1, no. 172).

**Insurgency and Italian Counterinsurgency in Western Lika**

Unlike with the Ustaše, the majority of cases I coded involving the Italians were “combat”. Gračac serves as a good point of contrast. While the local Ustaše had killed at least 500 Serb civilians in the preceding days, without discrimination of age or gender, when the Italians arrived in the town they immediately did two things.

Firstly, Blackshirts immediately executed two men on the pretext that they had not handed in their weapons, as a warning to the population at large (AJ 110-264-859). The source does not name the ethnicity of these men, but it is likely they were Croats, as by this point there were few Serbs still in the town. Though done without
trial or process, the execution was nevertheless selective violence: even if the men were innocent, the intent seems not to have been punishment for the crime but to lay down the law, so to speak, to make an example of a very small number of people to subdue the rest. This upholds H2 in that with a strategic actor selective violence will be observed in a Zone 2 area (under incumbent control but somewhat threatened, as Gračac would be classified due to significant insurgent presence in its environs). This was not enough violence to create defection (see Kalyvas 2006), especially considering that this was essentially an ethnic conflict where ethnicity constrained choice (Kreidie and Monroe 2002) with only Croats left in the town and the surrounding Partisans being exclusively Serb. If these two men were armed Croats, it could be seen as a consolidation of control and neutralization, by way of example, of potential Ustaše challengers: hence, the benefit of this selective violence outweighed any cost (b>v: see Kalyvas 2006, 202-203).

Secondly, the Italian forces, using artillery, worked with the Domobrani under the command of General Lukić, who had arrived in Gračac, to push the Partisans away from the southern edge of the town, retaking Glogovo and breaking the brief siege, killing around 50 Partisans (Zbornik V. 32, no. 6). Hence, we see that as well as law and order under Italy’s banner, their priority was in fact establishing control by combat selectively targeted against insurgents, in line with H2 as Gračac overall would be typical of Zone 2 classification. Moreover, corroborating H3, Italian violence was targeting areas where insurgents had cut the railway line, ergo was targeted against an area of strategic importance. The Italian garrisoning of troops in Medak and involvement in fighting around the railway South of Gospić in the following days has the same strategic logic (Zbornik V.1 no. 26).

Though Udbina was cut off and Donji Lapac overrun, the Italians in Eastern Lika initially had a different relationship with the insurgents there, whose presence did not threaten the railway and was less of a threat to Italian interests, therefore not of strategic interest, unlike Gračac. Hence, they were able to pass to and from Udbina, through territory nominally controlled by the Partisans, without engagement (Zločini no. 256). This may be due to indirect communications between communist-inclined Partisan leaders and the Italians, via the direct connections between Četnik-inclined leaders such as Rađenović with the occupiers as seen in a report of the outcome between a Četnik-Italian meeting in August on the details of the Italian reoccupation,
at which it was agreed that Donji Lapac and Kulen Vakuf would remain outside the Italians’ hands \((Zbornik\ V.1,\ no.\ 14)\), hence their lack of presence during the ensuing Kulen Vakuf massacre. Further, a report from the “Re” Division’s headquarters mentions that around Gospić, Serbs greeted Italian troops with cries of “Viva Italia, Viva Il Duce” \((Zločini\ no.\ 202)\).

This cooperation is shown, for example, by the fact that the Italians did not help the Domobrani in Gračac in their attack towards Donji Lapac of 7 August on Rudopolje, Bruvanjsko and Bruvno, in which they were repelled \((Zločini\ br.\ 210)\). Nor in their larger attack from 17-19 August, an attempt to retake Donji Lapac and relieve Kulen Vakuf, completely surrounded, as part of a pincer move whose other flank came from the East, which resulted in hundreds of Domobran casualties \((Zbornik\ V.\ 1,\ no.\ 16;\ Zbornik\ Xiii.\ no.\ 136)\).

Hence, in line with H3, the pattern of Italian use of violence was that it was used in combat, or selectively against civilians, in areas of actual strategic concern to them. As for the Domobrani, involvement in and facilitation of some Ustaše atrocities aside \((e.g.,\ Suvaja)\), before the demilitarization they were more concerned about using combat in order to reassert Croatian control over NDH territory, and unlike the Italians, who did not act decisively to relieve Kulen Vakuf and Udbina, seem to have been inclined to see territorial contiguity of NDH-controlled territory as of strategic importance: their main difference with the Ustaše being that in the operations they led they primarily targeted Partisans in areas where they were a threat, rather than Serb civilian populations \((cf.\ Jug\ 2004)\).

The pattern of Italian response is shown by their proclivity to respond to insurgency by executions of men, of which there were seven cases I have coded throughout Lika. All of these were military aged men, all Serb. They had all been issued with sentences by military courts, hence there was a semblance of process: and they actually were connected with the Partisans, for example two POWs executed on 27 September who had been captured while attacking a gendarme station \((Zbornik\ V.\ 32,\ no.\ 28)\). The larger number of Serbs executed reflects the fact that the insurgency was essentially ethnic in 1941, rather than dislike of Serbs, of which there is little evidence. The Italians indeed were working with Četnik factions, whom they were more positively disposed towards given their own ethnic-territorial conflict in Dalmatia with Croats \((see\ Popović,\ Lolić\ and\ Latas\ 1988)\). On the ground this often
took the form of ethnic *divide-et-impera* tactics, as one report from Otočac makes clear (AJ 110-582-360), likely a way to forestall effective resistance in this Zone 1 area.

The use of selective violence was also clearly preferred by the Partisans in Western Lika, contrasted to their more violent counterparts in the South-East of the region. This is likely due to a stronger consolidation of Communist command, which meant that as well as lacking any “nationalizing” intent, they followed the KPJ’s military tactics. These are best summarised by Dulić, who argues that their inability to wage frontal warfare led to a policy of small scale guerrilla attacks targeting infrastructure especially, and focusing on areas where they had the greatest political advantage (2015a, 244), to use Kalyvas’ (2006) terminology, the greatest ability to attract defection, in this case meaning the Serb population. Attacks against infrastructure were the most frequent form in Lika, especially in the Autumn (*Zbornik* Xiii. 1, no. 172), though I have coded only cases of lethal violence. However, even when using lethal violence against incumbent areas, Partisan attacks in Western Lika were selective.

For example, on 2 September Partisans killed personnel guarding harvesters in Barlete (*Zbornik* v. 1, no. 154), on 3 September unsuccessfully attacked Široka Kula (*Zbornik* v. 1, no. 154), reduced the Udbina enclave further by taking Podlapac (*Zbornik* v. 1, no. 152), and overran the gendarmerie station in Bunić, taking the village (*Zbornik* v. 1, no. 154). In taking these incumbent areas, they selectively attacked NDH targets such as gendarmerie stations and soldiers, rather than civilians, seeming to falsify H2.

This is likely due to the reality that they were not constrained by information failure, but due to their detailed local knowledge they knew exactly where to attack. Though there were cases of Croats fleeing, such as from Gračac (*Zbornik* V.1, no. 158), and from Bunić in early September (*Zbornik* V. 1, no. 163), these were due to the Italian policy of refugee return, and there were no massacres of Croats.

These selective attacks continued on 5-6 September, with attacks against Domobrani in villages in the Lovinac area on 5, unsuccessful attacks on 6 against Prijeboj by Korenica Partisans and against Bilaj and Barlete right outside Gospić, and Ustaše lines North-East of Široka Kula (*Zbornik* V. 1, no. 158). Another source from Gračac points to Četnik presence, likely under Italian patronage, with reprisals.
(robberies and intimidation) occurring in Štikada in November against Serbs who had converted to Catholicism (Zločini no. 361). Perhaps this can be called a form of selective punishment against *ethnic defection*, an unusual phenomenon but plausible given that pressured conversions to Catholicism became state policy in September, still technically applying in Lika as it remained formally part of the NDH, although no data on levels of conversions in Lika is available due to lack of NDH civil authorities thanks to the Italian occupation (Biondich 2005).

Besides the tactics discussed above, another reason for the Partisans’ use of selective violence was that the insurgency became less ethnic in autumn in Western Lika, with a Croat unit formed at Smiljan (Zbornik V. 1, nos. 39, 41), and involvement of local Croats in an ambush in the village in late October (Zbornik V. 2, no. 21). This is due to the specific ideology of the KPJ (stronger in Western Lika than South-Eastern, where, thanks in part to Italian manipulation as discussed, Četniks had strength). The reconciliatory message from the (Serb) people of Bunić to the (Croat) people of Čanak is an early example of Tito’s ideology of “Brotherhood and Unity” in action (Zbornik V.1 no. 25). Hence, the extent to which ethnicity was *constraining choice* (Kreidie and Monroe 2002) was reducing in Western Lika though 1941.

H2 seems however corroborated regarding the Western Lika Partisans in one respect: like the Italians, they used selective violence in the form of exemplary executions in policing the territory that they controlled but was threatened due to proximity to enemy areas (Zone 4 areas). For example, there were two cases of Partisans executing “suspect persons” such as “spies” and “black marketers”, in Smiljan (four people on 25 October) (Zbornik V. 30, no. 21) and in Medak (four people on 31 October) (Zbornik V.2, no. 21), both areas near the lines.

Another good example of the Partisan use of selective violence, this time as retaliation against NDH personnel, is in events in late August, when in response for an Ustaše murder on 22 of one civilian at Prokike near Brinje, Brinje Partisans killed one local Ustaše in the neighbouring village of Žuta Lokva (Zbornik V.1, no. 16). Five days later, when in retaliation the Ustaše attempted to attack Prokike again, they were ambushed by the Brinje Partisans and pushed back, losing one man (Zbornik V.1, no. 16), with the Brinje Partisans also killing an Ustaša in the nearby hamlet of Županjol the same day (Zbornik V.1, no 146). The defensive actions and targeted retaliation against actual Ustaše shows that they were not constrained by information
failure, and so their use of selective violence is a conscious choice therefore 
upholding Kalyvas’ (2006) arguments on the preferable nature of this form of 
violence.

Partisan activities became bolder in late September, overrunning Otrić on 18 
(Zločini no. 287), directly on the railway line, and making major gains around Brinje, 
pushing NDH forces out of Brlog on 21 September, though Italian troops prevented 
them from establishing full control (Zbornik V.1, 39), and attacking Dabar on 26 
(Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 172).

A handful of atrocities were committed by Italian forces attached to the “Re” 
Division in Lika in 1941, which as well as providing a point of contrast with the 
Ustaše, provide an interesting study in counterinsurgent warfare in relation to the 
Hypotheses. Following the kidnapping of a handful of railway workers near Vrhovine 
and mining of the tracks (Zbornik 13. 1, no. 146), Italian troops arrived in nearby 
Crna Vlast on 27 September, and arrested many, and according to one source 
(Zbornik V.1, 47) killed, male villagers. This village was an area of Partisan activity, 
hence typical of Kalyvas’ (2006) Zone 2 classification, and the Italian forces were 
targeting only men, potential insurgents, preferring arrests while using violence more 
selectively, hence corroborating H2. On their way out of Crna Vlast, the Italian 
convoy was ambushed by the local Partisans, who threw a bomb and opened fire on 
the soldiers as they fled the vehicles. According to the Partisan source five Italians 
were killed and eleven injured (Zbornik V.1, 47), while according to the Italian source 
they only had injuries (Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 146); however, both agree that two civilian 
hostages in the truck were killed.

Having been directly attacked and taken casualties, the Italians now responded 
much more forcefully. Two days later, they attacked the nearby village of Zalužnica, 
to where many of the villagers of Crna Vlast had fled with the Partisans, fearing 
reprisals. Not only was the targeting of this village due to the latter, but also due to the 
recent kidnapping of an Italian colonel in nearby the hamlet of Lalići (Zbornik Xiii.1, 
no. 149). On arrival, the Italian forces burnt twenty-five houses, and having forced 
them to assemble in the Orthodox Church, escorted the villagers away under guard to 
Vrhovine (Zbornik V.1, no. 50; Zbornik V. 32, no. 28). This makes for an interesting 
counter-insurgency comparison, similar to the tactic the US Army would use in
Vietnam, of relocating villagers to guarded hamlets in order to isolate the insurgents (Fein 1994).

In Zalužnica, the Italian troops also arrested three men from Crna Vlast, whom they had found in the village, executing them the next day in Vrhovine (Zbornik V.1, no. 50). The case of Crna Vlast and Zalužnica is thus one of selective violence insofar as it resulted in deaths. As well as corroborating H2 in that this was an area where Italian control was threatened, this upholds Kalyvas’ (2006) argument on the preferable nature of selective violence: the Italians had information that the villagers of Crna Vlast had fled to Zalužnica, and acted on it, executing as a warning three men who may have been Partisans, or at least whose deaths would be a warning to the Partisans. It is also interesting to notice that the Italian response was much more forceful once their own men were targeted: they did not care so much if Croatian personnel were targeted.

The next case of Italian reprisals followed on the heels of Zalužnica, again in the Vrhovine area. This was the burning of Vrelo Koreničko on 2 October, in response to the killing of four Italian soldiers in a nearby ambush (Zbornik V.1, no. 189). At least one civilian was killed. The burning was much more complete, sparing only the school and one house, while this and the lack of targeted arrests show a more indiscriminate nature in this retaliation. It seems the reason is that unlike with Zalužnica, the Italians lacked information on the perpetrators, or alternatively could not apprehend them, and furthermore may have been angered by the apparent fact that their last reprisal at Zalužnica had not worked, indeed had provoked a deadly ambush. So the case of Vrelo Koreničko combines information failure with reprisal.

The following two months were to see a pattern strikingly similar to the previous month’s, namely increasing Partisan attacks on Italian forces being met by increasingly violent reprisals from the “Re” Division.

Soon after Vrelo Koreničko, fighting again broke out around Dabar (7 October) (Zbornik V.1, no. 205) and Brlog (20-21 October) (Zbornik V. 1, no. 211; Zbornik 13.1, no. 172). On 24 October, as Croats became recruited into the Partisans, four Ustaše were killed at Smiljan (Zbornik V. 2, no. 21), and soon after twelve Italians were killed in an ambush of a train at Blata followed by another ambush on the railway the following day at Javornik (Zbornik V. 30, no. 21), and an ambush on 7 November at Rapain Klanac killing one Italian (Zbornik V. 2, no. 44; Zbornik Xiii.1,
no. 205). These were all areas mainly under incumbent control, though with some Partisan presence, Zone 2 areas. This shows that if the insurgents have localized knowledge, as the Partisans did, then their attacks in incumbent areas may be selective rather than indiscriminate, contrary to H2, as indeed the preferable nature of selective violence would presumably still be valid if an actor attacking an area in which they lack control nevertheless has sufficient information for selective targeting.

The proximity to the railway line, the most important communication line in Lika whose defence and destruction was respectively a strategic priority of the Italians and Partisans as seen continuously in my primary source material (see for example Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 172), also clearly corroborates H3 in that violence exerted by strategic actors occurs in proximity to areas of strategic concern.

A larger ambush followed at Mekinjar, a Partisan-held village outside Udbina, on 10-12 November, where a group of Antifascist Youth organized on their own initiative and without approval an ambush against an Italian patrol (Zbornik V.2, no. 21; Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 205). Though it does corroborate H2 in that this was selective violence of a sort in a Zone 4 area (Partisan control but with some Italian presence), this case perhaps suggests that ideology may have on occasion caused Partisans to use potentially costly violence with little clear benefit, as this action risked provoking Italian reprisals in an area of relative calm regarding Partisan-Italian engagements.

The Italian response to renewed Partisan activity was limited to executions, for example of two Serbs in Perušić and Gospić, respectively (on 8 and 11 November) (Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 205), and ramping up of security along the railway line and at other economic installations: for example, one Partisan was killed on 13 November during an attack on an unsuccessful sawmill in Kosinj (Zbornik V.2, no. 76) (twelve days later the Croat population of the town, who had reason to fear reprisals given the intensity of the massacres in this area in July-August, fought off another Partisan attack [Zbornik V. 32, no. 47]).

However, Partisan attacks intensified, and were selective in targeting Italian military in areas of greater incumbent control, thus seeming to go against H2. On 22 November an ambush killed one Italian at Melnice, Otočac (Zbornik V.2, no. 23; Zbornik 13.1, no. 205), and on 24 November an Italian patrol of five-six soldiers was wiped out by local Partisans on the tracks near Škare (Zbornik V. 30, no. 21), again in the Vrhovine-Brinje area, and the following day another Italian soldier was killed in
the same village, by Partisans attempting to mine the tracks (Zbornik V. 2, no. 76). These three events resulted in mass arrests by the Italian forces in the surrounding area (Zbornik V. 2, no. 23), a selective response corroborating H2.

This however did not deter the Partisans, who stepped up their attacks in North-Western Lika. Firstly, during the mass arrests, a Blackshirt officer was killed near Brinje (Zbornik V. 2, no. 23), while on 26 November an ambush at Otočac, a securely Axis-controlled town, killed six Italians (Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 205). On 28 November, four more Italians were killed by Zalužnica Partisans at Sinac near Otočac, again on the railway tracks (Zbornik V. 2, no. 76). On 2 December, three more selective attacks happened against Italian troops in areas typical of the Zone 2 classification: at Žuta Lokva five were killed in a truck and at Dabar two officers were killed in an ambush (Zbornik V. 2, no. 56), and at Rudopolje one corporal was killed on the tracks (Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 205).

In response to the attacks in the area, the Italians now retaliated against the villages again but this time more brutally. In response to the killing of Italian officers, Dabar and its environs were raided by around 2,000 Italian troops, who killed eleven civilians and burnt many houses (Zbornik V. 2, no. 56). Note however the contrast with the Ustaše: mere handfuls of Ustaše had killed vast numbers of civilians. They also targeted another area of Partisan activity, around the railway tracks West of the Plitvice area, near where the attacks happened, corroborating H3 in focusing on areas of strategic concern.

On 4 December the hamlet of Živica, in the vicinity of the railway line, was attacked: twenty-five men were executed, at least three more arrested, and the entire village burnt (Zbornik V. 32, no. 49). Women and children were escorted away and placed under Italian guard. Though still gendered, this is a case of more indiscriminate incumbent violence, especially by Italian standards, in an area where the incumbent had advantage in terms of control, thus going against H2: given the circumstances, it can however almost certainly be said to be due to information failure, as the continued operations of Partisans despite previous Italian measures would suggest, and though with smaller numbers bears more similarity to the German policy of executions of men in retaliation against fatal Partisan attacks (Gumz 2001; Mazower 1992).
Similarly, on the same day, Petrinić Polje, another nearby hamlet, was also burnt with five civilians killed (Zbornik V. 32, no. 49). This wave of counterinsurgent reprisals in Serb villages around the railway continued the next day, with house burnings and arrests at Glibodol, Bobići and Mala Kapela (Zbornik V. 32, no. 49). H3 is however corroborated in that the strategically motivated Italians targeted areas of strategic concern, as these villages with some Partisan presence were located not only near the railway but near the railway tunnels at Blata, whose potential destruction would be a serious problem, the security of this section of the tracks thus being extremely paramount.

![Figure 5: North-Western Lika (Vrhovine-Otočac area)](image_url)

The pattern of forceful Italian retaliation coming only when their own soldiers were killed or repelled can be seen in contemporaneous events around Gospić to the South. On 24 November, joint Italian attacks involving some Croats under their command had been launched to retake Divoselo, Ornice and Smiljan, villages circling
Gospić whose securing was thus of strategic importance, corroborating H3. These had been unsuccessful, with four killed at Divoselo and two at Smiljan, and the Partisan defence including Croats from Smiljan (Zbornik V.2, no. 76). In response to the resistance encountered, the Italians the following day attacked Divoselo again, burning part of the village, which resulted in two boys being killed (Zbornik V.2, no. 76; Zbornik Xiii. 1, no. 205).

As before, the Partisans were not deterred, and on 26 November the Velebit Battalion (operating around Gospić) ambushed Italian troops on the railway line near Bilaj, just outside Gospić (Zbornik V.2, no. 76), and killing four more in another ambush on the railway near Lovinac to the South on 6 December (Zbornik V.2, no. 76), further cases of selective attacks on incumbent areas, going against H3. The Italians responded with an execution in Gospić on 9 December (Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 205).

Partisan attacks continued, against Rizvanuša and Sveti Rok on 11 December, respectively killing two Croats, and killing seven and displacing eighty (Zbornik V.32, no. 52). This latter source, written by Frković, gives few details, and the nature of these attacks is unclear, but in the case of Rizvanuša it is more likely to have been a selective attack as this was in the Velebit Battalion’s area; in Sveti Rok, the attack may have had overtones of ethnic reprisal, as the persecutions of Serb defectors in Štikada, one of Sveti Rok’s neighbouring villages, and the closer vicinity of South-Eastern Lika shows that elements thus inclined were perhaps stronger in that area, with Budak’s home village of Sveti Rok, a “wild Ustaše” stronghold, an obvious target. If the attack on Sveti Rok were to be classified as indiscriminate, which would seem likely, this would then corroborate H2, predicting indiscriminate insurgent attacks in incumbent areas, though likely necessitating the same theoretical considerations as the indiscriminate attacks on Croat villages discussed above.

The final engagement between the Italian military and Partisans in Lika in 1941 occurred on 29 December when an Italian patrol that entered Partisan territory in North-Eastern Lika, around Bijelo Polje, vanished. The patrol sent into the area to find them took casualties on coming under fire, and retreated (Zbornik V. 2, no. 111; Zbornik Xiii.1, no. 205). This hints at the more fixed territorial nature of Zones of Control, an insurgent controlled East and an incumbent-controlled West, that would
define Lika through 1942 until the large “Fourth Enemy Offensive” (Case White) of early 1943 that would see an Italian invasion of Eastern Lika (Colić 1988).

**Concluding Observations**

In concluding, it is necessary finally to summarize in a succinct manner the discussion of the three Hypotheses, which were essentially formulated with a view to analysing correlations between patterns of violence and the intent of the actors, predicting contrasts. Having done so, I will end by linking the relevance of the thesis to the theoretical realm and to that of historiography on Lika. I will firstly proceed by summarizing the findings relevant to each Hypothesis.

My findings, as discussed qualitatively, have shown a strong corroboration of H1, predicting an increasingly indiscriminate progression of killings and increasingly institutionalized level, with the case of the Ustaše in Lika. Killings of Serbs began on a sporadic level, with raids on villages, but quickly moved towards a pattern of lethal violence targeting local prominent Serbs, reflecting the nation-wide pattern and linked to Zagreb’s stated policy of “decapitating” the Serb population through removal of defined categories such as Orthodox clergy and Srbijanci, and other prominent persons.

This shifted in late June towards a radicalisation of policy in the parts of Lika within Krbava-Psat County. First, the complete ethnic cleansing of villages in the Plitvice Lakes area, which although a non-lethal form of violence nevertheless was a radicalization in the sense that it targeted women and children. In a matter of days, and due to the personal role of Luburić and Ustaše returnees, this progressed to a series of large-scale massacres predominantly targeting children, women and elderly, at Suvaja and other nearby villages. The strength of the corroboration of H1 is apparent given the direct involvement of the representative of the Ustaše elite who formulated the movement’s policy of “nationalizing war”.

It was in Lika-Gacka County that lethal violence against Serbs began to first progress from continuous massacres of elites to their institutionalized destruction, not only on a regional but also national level, through the elite-managed Gospić-Velebit-Pag Camp System. Adding to the level of institutionalization, the camps were highly atomized in the sense that numerous agencies were involved in this specific project of
mass killings, including the Gospić Police, the UNS, Ustaše courts across the country, railway authorities, local Lika Ustaše and so on.

Regarding Jews, the camp system also constitutes a radicalization from definition by decree and various forms of economic and non-lethal persecution, to institutionalized Judeocide in the form of gendered killings of adult Jewish men. I have also argued that the Holocaust at these camps has a rather under-considered wider significance regarding the continent-wide process of cumulative radicalization, which with H1 in mind can be summarized as the progression by the Nazis and their allies of killings of specific categories of Jews and Jews in particular areas, to the official policy of killing all Jews in Europe, also a corroboration of H3. Furthermore, I have also presented one piece of evidence that suggests that lethal persecution of Roma may have already been sporadic but gender-neutral at these camps.

Regarding Lika Serbs, the camps functioned initially as an institutionalization of “decapitation”, but quickly began to target the Serb male population more generally. Moreover, in mid-July, the killing operation around the camps began to encompass gender- and age-neutral mass killings at localized killing sites, strongly corroborating H1. Finally, the Ustaše’s response to insurgency led to a further radicalization of the process of completely indiscriminate killings of Serbs in areas of NDH control, with thousands of Serbs of all genders and ages killed in a single week following 26 July, notably at Prijeboj, Smiljan and at sites within Bosnia where many Lika Serbs perished. This was undertaken despite the cost outweighing the benefit by fuelling insurgency and provoking the Italian intervention that ended it, showing that nationalizing war is indeed starkly different phenomenon to strategic war where actors aim to maintain control of territory.

Not only this, but the rebellion in the first place was already a response, in the form of self-defence (and in certain areas, revenge), to the Ustaše policy of sanctioned massacres, corroborating strongly Kalyvas’ arguments that indiscriminate violence can be counterproductive to territorial control. This can be observed in the most basic sense by an overview of the temporal progression of phases: nationalizing war; insurgency, loss of territory and revenge atrocities; Ustaše genocidal counterinsurgency; a stronger insurgency and loss of more NDH territory; Italian intervention and the NDH’s de facto loss of all of Lika; and a complete changing of the dynamics of violence to a more strategically motivated form.
My findings regarding H2, which predicted that the selective or indiscriminate nature of violence will depend on the perpetrator’s level of control, have more nuance. Regarding the insurgents, there is firstly a stark contrast between those in South-Eastern Lika and Kulen Vakuf, and those in Western and Northern Lika.

Let us reconsider the former first. Their indiscriminate attacks do corroborate H2 in that they occurred in an area of incumbent control, but the reason of information failure mainly assumed by Kalyvas’ (2006) argument, on which H2 is based, is not quite right due to a positive correlation between the use of indiscriminate violence and the differing ethnicity of its targets with the insurgents. This suggests personalized revenge in the context of collective ethnic polarization, though in the case of Kulen Vakuf especially, the presence of long-term anti-Muslim bias is strong.

In the latter case, where initially indiscriminate killings briefly intensified as insurgent control was consolidated (Bergholz 2010), going against H2 initially at least, this is due mainly to the influence of Četnik factions, whose policy was more in line with “nationalizing war” though lacking the apparatus necessary to institutionalize it, and a divergence between the strategically-motivated Communist command and the rank-and-file, whose emotions mixed revenge, immediate polarization and long-term prejudice. Hence, I have proposed that “pogrom” is the best way by which to classify these atrocities.

In the West of Lika, however, there was a noticeable lack of indiscriminate insurgent violence. In line with H2, they used violence selectively in areas they controlled (all of which were somewhat threatened, hence Zone 4). However, contrary to the Hypothesis and to the insurgents in South-Eastern Lika, their attacks against incumbent-controlled areas were of a highly selective nature, which reflects both the ideology and tactics of the KPJ (Dulić 2015a), whose control amongst insurgents in Western Lika appears less challenged by Četniks than in the South-East of the province. It also reflects the likelihood that local knowledge meant that information failure was not an issue, hence that they had sufficient intelligence for selective targeting even in areas where they lacked control.

As for the Italians and Domobrani, they too demonstrated a clear preference for selective violence in areas where they maintained control but faced some opposition from Partisans, corroborating H2, suggesting that cost-benefit calculations may have had influence on their part: given especially the Italian alliance with
Četniks (Popović, Lolić and Latas 1988), the risk of creating defection amongst Serbs to the Partisans instead may have been a real consideration. Even when their reprisals took a more indiscriminate form, as at Živica, they remained gendered, targeting men—hence were selective as compared to the Ustaše, and either due to information failure or still explainable as a form of counter-insurgency, explicable perhaps in light of Kalyvas’ arguments on “secondary profiling”, i.e. targeting men more likely to be associated with the insurgency (2006, 187-188; cf. Limani 2014).

Hence, in the case of strategically motivated counterinsurgent actors, H2 is corroborated overall: but in the case of the insurgents, it is somewhat falsified, for the reasons discussed. I would say that Kalyvas’ (2006) arguments, on which H2 is based, could thus be strengthened by greater consideration of the possibility of the preferable nature of selective violence also applying in certain cases to attacks against areas outside the attacker’s control if information allows selectivity, especially in areas where Zones of opposing Control are small and in proximity to each other, and where the arguments about defection thus may not be so dependent on levels of control: for civilians even in securely incumbent-held towns, Partisan-held territory was never too far away (and vice versa).

H3, which argued for differences in the geographic spread of violence exercised by actors with different intents, is strongly corroborated regarding both types of actors. In the case of the Ustaše, waging “nationalizing war”, this is very clearly seen in that the first attacks were against the Serb-majority Eastern parts of the region, where the Croats lacked a demographic advantage and resistance seems to have been anticipated, in line with Dulić and Hall’s (2014) arguments. Likewise in line with the latter, we can see a spatial spreading out of Ustaše massacres during the summer, with the organised institutional destruction (Dulić 2005) gradually spreading out to include localized killings sites (simultaneous with the process of de-gendering violence). A radicalization of this process is seen in response to the outbreak of the rebellion, with Serb villages everywhere the Ustaše maintained or retook control being attacked brutally, and the largest number of village attacks being observed around Gospić and Perušić, Croat-majority areas, thus seeming also to uphold Dulić and Hall’s arguments that Ustaše destruction reached the highest levels in areas of Croat majority (2014).
In contrast, the strategically-motivated Domobrani focused on waging military combat in order to relieve surrounded areas, whose reconnection with larger areas of NDH control seems a strategic priority for them, thus corroborating H3’s predictions regarding strategic actors.

Finally, the Italians’ use of violence clearly corroborates very robustly H3, in that whatever form it took (combat, selective violence or more indiscriminate) it seems to have been executed in close spatial proximity to areas or objects of strategic concern, especially the railway (and most of all where railway tunnels are found), and around larger towns, notably Gospić, Gračac and Otočac.

This thesis has largely corroborated common predictions around the differing patterns of violence executed by actors with differing intents and interests. Corroboration is particularly strong regarding “nationalizing war”, whose danger as a phenomenon is starkly clear not only in the progressively radicalizing logic that dictates it, but especially in its blindness to the cost of this type of violence to the perpetrator himself. My more nuanced findings on strategically motivated actors perhaps reflect that the dynamics of violence in the context of strategic warfare are more dependent on the specificities of the immediate situation. Provided that caveats are allowed in certain contexts, Kalyvas’ (2006) model (amenable to nuance in that it provides explanations for why certain types of violence happen in certain contexts which can be extended to explain exceptions to his own predictions) has been generally corroborated as a strong model on which to base analysis of insurgent-counterinsurgent war where intent such as the Ustaše’s is lacking.

Returning, in conclusion, to this thesis’ relevance to the study of Lika in its own right, I hope that in using a hypothetico-deductive method and theory-driven analysis I have provided a new angle in, firstly, explaining differentiations between Axis mass killings and violence; and, secondly, by including insurgent atrocities and violence in a simultaneous analysis, I also hope I have bridged the divide between those who exclusively analyse one or the other, and in a way that, in using wider theories, lifts the analysis out of the specificities of Balkan historical discourse. Finally, the thesis opens a lacuna for an extension of the same mode of hypothetical analysis to the later War years in Lika, and indeed to the violence in the region that was reignited in 1991-1995.
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