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FASCISM 5 (2016) 3-25

FASCISM
JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE FASCIST STUDIES
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From Obscure Beginnings to State 'Resurrection': Ideas and Practices of the Ustaša Organization

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Abstract

In the contemporary literature on the Ustaša organization and its terror regime, the organization is often seen and described as a vague and peripheral case study. Neither the establishment of the Ustaša state, nor the very purpose for which the organization was established, can be understood without taking into consideration the context of its formation, organizational and ideological structure as well as the influences its members were exposed to during their formative period. Therefore the article focuses on the development of its organizational and ideological aspects. The aim is to analyze the basic features and aspects of the Ustaša organization which show that by the mid-1930s, and perhaps even earlier, the Ustaša organization fully evolved into a fascist organization.

Keywords

fascism – Croatia – Ustaša

Within the field of fascist studies, the Ustaša organization and its terror regime – the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* [NDH, Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945] – is usually regarded as a vague and peripheral case study. There are many reasons for this. Most often it can be attributed to a lack of language skills or insufficient knowledge about source materials, or as the result of deficiencies in terms of contextualization and method, which is a notable problem among Croatian scholars. Croatian scholars rarely get engaged in such analysis

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and tend to neglect any broader scholarly analysis of fascism.[1] However, during the last decade scholars have begun to produce works of higher value and quality, which have shed a somewhat different light on the Ustaša organization and regime.[2]

Neither the establishment of the Ustaša state, nor the very purpose for which the organization was established, can be understood without taking into consideration the context of its formation, organizational and ideological structure as well as the influences its members were exposed to during their formative period. It is for this reason that in this article I focus on the development of its organization and ideology. Particular emphasis is placed on the relationship established between the Ustaša rank-and-file and their charismatic *Poglavnik* [leader], as well as on the complicated question of whether the organization managed to mobilize sections of Croatian society for its cause and ideas. The aim is to reveal the basic features and aspects of the Ustaša organization, which show that by the mid-1930s and perhaps even earlier, the Ustaša organization had fully evolved into a fascist organization.

A Prelude to Action – Obscure Beginnings

The 1920s were a turbulent period in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Ever since the new state was established on 1 December 1918, various groups, individuals, and political parties either worked for its dissolution or argued for its complete restructuring. On the one hand, a majority of Croatian and, to a certain extent, Slovenian politicians argued for devolution of power

1 In his book *The Nature of Fascism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), Roger Griffin detected the problem of taxonomy and position of the Ustašas regarding generic fascism. On the other hand Stanley G. Payne, in his book *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) described the Ustaša movement as being fascist. In contrast to all this, Croatian scholars rarely get engaged in such analysis and tend to neglect any broader scholarly analysis of fascism regarding the Ustaša movement. See for example Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga i Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2007).

2 See for example Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killings in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1941–1942* (Uppsala: Studia historica Upsaliensis, 2005); Rory Yeomans, 'Militant Women, Warrior Men and Revolutionary Personae: The New Ustasha Man and Woman in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945,' *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 4 (2005): 685–732; Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Nevenko Bartulin, 'The Ideal Nordic-Dinaric Racial Type: Racial Anthropology in the Independent State of Croatia,' *Review of Croatian History* no.1 (2009): 189–219.

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and federalization, whilst on the other hand, a majority of Serbian politicians argued for centralization.[3] From the outset the new state faced the challenge of having to 'integrate seven different territories, each with its own legislative and administrative system,'[4] while simultaneously having to cope with problems of economic integration caused by the fact that it was composed of 'four different railway networks, five currencies, and six customs areas and legal systems.'[5]

The acute divisions affecting political life in the Kingdom culminated in violent parliamentary conflict. During a parliamentary debate in June 1928 concerning the ratification of the Nettuno Conventions,[6] Puniša Račić of the Serbian *Radikalna stranka* [RS; Radical Party] shot and killed several members of the *Hrvatska seljačka stranka* [HSS; Croatian Peasant Party], while mortally wounding its leader Stjepan Radić. Radić died on 8 August 1928 and his funeral turned into a Croatian political demonstration against the Belgrade regime.[7]

As the demonstrations in Croatia continued, King Alexander proclaimed a dictatorship on 6 January 1929.[8] In his Royal Proclamation the King stated: 'The moment has arrived when there can, and should, be no intermediary between the nation and the King . . . . The parliamentary system and our entire political life has taken on an increasingly negative character . . . . It is my sacred duty to preserve the unity of nation and State by all means; and I am determined to fulfill this duty to the end without hesitation.'[9] The King also enforced new administrative changes, dividing the country into nine *banovine* [provinces]. He abolished the freedom of press as well as all political parties with national, religious, or regional features. The name of the country was changed to Yugoslavia, whereby the new leadership tried to establish a new and supra-national identity.[10]

3 J. B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934–1941* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 1–9.

4 Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis*, 1.

5 John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118.

6 The Nettuno Conventions were a complex trade agreement favorable to the Italian interests signed in June 1925 between Italy and the Kingdom. See Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 158.

7 Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska povijest* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2003), 249; Ljubo Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke, 1928–1941* (Zagreb: Liber, 1974), 19.

8 Goldstein, *Hrvatska povijest*, 249–251.

9 'Royal Proclamation Abrogating the Constitution and Dissolving the Parliament of the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom,' in Snežana Trifunovska, *Yugoslavia Through Documents: From its Creation to its Dissolution* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1994), 73.

10 Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 327.

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The Establishment of the Ustaša Organization

Immediately following the Parliament shooting, Ante Pavelić, a Croat nationalist, gave a statement to reporters in which he said that '[t]his crime, committed towards the Croatian representatives, is meaningful and well prepared' and that '[t]here shall be a tremendous shift in the political situation.'[11] Pavelić had become a leading figure in the *Hrvatska stranka prava* [HSP; Croatian Party of State Rights] during the 1920s. In this decade he maintained relations with numerous Croatian emigrants, mostly former military officers and officials who served in the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and who refused to accept the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.[12] These people kept close and constant contacts with Rome, while simultaneously maintaining contacts with Croatian politicians and personalities.[13] On his way to Paris in 1927, where he participated in an international conference of municipal representatives, Pavelić met with former Austro-Hungarian Colonel Stjepan Sarkotić in Vienna, who arranged a meeting between Pavelić and Robert Forges Davanzati, editor of *La Tribune* and member of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* [PNF; National Fascist Party]. The meeting with Davanzati took place in Rome in July 1927, during which Pavelić argued for the establishment of a Croatian state and for the principle of ethnic self-determination.[14] It was during this early period that Pavelić established himself as an important figure in Croatian émigré circles. As James Sadkovich notes, Pavelić provided the émigré circles with, 'new strength, marking a new type of separatist, completely different from the old émigrés, who emitted the smell of a decomposed Habsburg Monarchy.'[15]

11 Mijo Bzik, ed., *Putem Hrvatskog državnog prava: Poglavnikovi govori, izjave i članci prije odlaska u tudjinu* (Zagreb: Naklada Glavnog ustaškog stana, 1942).

12 Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 17. Members of this organization formed the Croatian Committee in May 1919, with their headquarters first in Graz, then Vienna, and later in Budapest. Despite the fact that at the beginning they were united, they soon started disagreeing over many questions, especially those concerning their future actions and objectives. The Committee split into two groups, the so-called 'legitimists' led by Colonel General Baron Stjepan Sarkotić and the other one led by Ivo Frank, son of Josip Frank, the former president of the Croatian Party of State Rights. The main difference between the two groups was in their concept of how to achieve the independence of Croatia.

13 James J. Sadkovich, *Italija i Ustaše, 1927–1937* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2010), 35.

14 Sadkovich, *Italija i Ustaše*, 38–39.

15 Ibid., 40.

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Besides becoming known in Croatian émigré and international circles, Pavelić had also entered the National Assembly. As a member of the Croatian Party of State Rights which formed the *Hrvatski blok* [Croatian Bloc] with the *Hrvatska federalistička seljačka stranka* [HFSS; Croatian Federalist Peasant Party] of Ante Trumbić in the 1927 elections, Pavelić won a mandate in Zagreb thus entering the National Assembly. In his first speech he emphasized that 'the fact of the participation of the Croatian Bloc in the parliamentary work of the National Assembly does not mean that we acknowledge and approve the existing situation. On the contrary, the Croatian Bloc will work with all lawful means to change the situation for the Croatian people through the establishment of Croatian state sovereignty.'[16] Even prior to his entering into the National Assembly and the parliament shooting, Pavelić opposed the existing Kingdom and argued for Croatian independence. In an article written for *Kalendar Hrvatski Blok* [Calendar Croatian Bloc] in 1925, he wrote that 'the Croatian people are guided by the idea of their . . . right of self-determination, which shall make the people masters in their own house.'[17] In 1927 Pavelić associated the notion of independence with religious sentiments when stating that '[a]fter Golgotha the Resurrection must come. The force of Croatian people can never dry out.'[18] In November 1928 he once again had recourse to religious language when arguing that '[t]he ten year long Calvary of the Croatian people cannot and must not end with some agreement, but only with a resurrection.'[19] This recourse to religious language and its application to the Croatian nation and state served to justify the view of the nation and the people as 'chosen', thus positioning it and those who led it unquestionably on the 'just' side. Such vocabulary infused with religious connotations continued throughout and developed further during the Ustaša regime, in what Iordachi describes as 'charismatic nationalism'.[20]

Along with his activities in the political arena, Pavelić started influencing and organizing youth, especially young members of his party. The *Savez*

16 Ante Pavelić, 'Nismo došli ovdje da to stanje priznamo,' in *Putem Hrvatskog državnog prava: Poglavnikovi govori, izjave i članci prije odlaska u tudjinu*, ed. Mijo Bzik (Zagreb: Naklada Glavnog ustaškog stana, 1942).

17 Ante Pavelić, 'Smije li se zdvajati?,' in *Putem Hrvatskog državnog prava*, ed. Mijo Bzik.

18 Ante Pavelić, 'Gore srca,' in Ibid.

19 Ante Pavelić, 'Svako popuštanje značilo bi izdaju Hrvatske i oskvrnuče lipanjskih žrtava,' in Ibid.

20 Constantin Iordachi, 'God's Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania,' in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 316–358.

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hrvatske pravaške republikanske omladine [SHPRO; Union of Croatian Rights Republican Youth] was formed in June 1927 and Branko Jelić, a close associate of Ante Pavelić, became its president. Soon afterwards a nation-wide youth organization of the *Hrvatski Domobran* [Croatian Home Guard] was founded on 1 October 1928 with the aim of organizing and encompassing youth on a national level.[21] This was registered as a public sport society, although it actually represented a platform for organizing a more coherent and active group whose purpose was to fight for Croatian independence.[22] The organization published its journal *Hrvatski Domobran* with Branimir Jelić as its main editor, while Mijo Bzik took over its board, both close associates of Pavelić.[23] The journal reached a circulation of around 30,000 copies by December 1928, despite the fact it was often confiscated and censored by the government.[24] Members of this organization were to wear uniforms consisting of 'a blue shirt with Croatian emblem on the left side of their breast, while their neckties were of white color with densely lined red cubes.'[25] They were also instructed on how to handle guns, thus forming a semi-military organization that resembled the later Ustaša organization.[26] According to one report, this organization was 'formed from swarms which counted four to five persons, on the basis of complete obedience to the group leader.'[27] Thus, the Croation Home Guard was envisioned as an undercover, paramilitary youth organization which later served as a platform for the establishment of the Ustaša organization.[28] Its members participated in supporting and attending various demonstrations, such as those which took place on 1 December 1928, on the ten-year anniversary of the Kingdom. Members were also involved in the assassination of Toni Schlegel, manager of publishing concern *Jugoštampa*, who was murdered by Mijo Babić

21 It is unclear who initiated the organization of the Croatian Home-Guard. Branimir Jelić argues that it was the SHPRO, while Mijo Bzik says that it was Pavelić who organized the whole thing. Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 54–55.

22 Ibid., 55.

23 Ibid., 56–57.

24 *Hrvatski Domobran – Omladinski list*, November 20, 1928; Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 58. Especially see his footnote number 192.

25 Hrvatski Državni Arhiv – HDA, Služba Državne Sigurnosti Republičkog Sekretarijata za unutrašnje poslove Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske – SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941.* – 013.1. Further on HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941.* – 013.1. The same account is given by Jareb in his book *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, see his footnote 179 on page 56.

26 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 55–56.

27 HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941.* – 013.1.

28 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 55–56.

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(he later became a prominent member of the Ustasha organization and close associate of Pavelić).[29]

Significantly, prior to the abolishment of the parliament in Yugoslavia, Pavelić and his associates established contacts with various groups and persons who stood firmly in opposition to this newly established state. While remaining politically active within a legal sphere they simultaneously organized and mobilized the youth *en masse* outside of the legal sphere of political life. Their idea was to organize youth on a national level, to militarize and regiment it in preparation for a confrontation with the regime. It was exactly these pre-1930 activities which created a platform for their future actions and provided a blueprint for the establishment of the Ustaša organization.

The *Poglavnik* and His Organization

With the abolishment of the Constitution by the King on 6 January 1929, Ante Pavelić decided to flee the country and leave for Vienna, where he again established contacts with Sarkotić, as well as with Branimir Jelić, the youth leader, and Gustav Perčec, secretary of the HSP who had fled to Vienna after organizing the 1928 demonstrations.[30]

In April 1929 Pavelić signed the Sofia declaration, which established cooperation between Ante Pavelić and Gustav Perčec on the one hand, and the Macedonian National Committee on the other, emphasizing the need to fight for political freedom and complete independence of Croatia and Macedonia.[31] As a result of this agreement, and his connections and meetings in Sofia with the *Vnatrešna makedonska revolucionerna organizacija* [VMRO; Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization] Pavelić was charged with conspiracy against the state and in July 1929 was sentenced to death *in absentia*.[32] The

29 For a detailed account of this early activities of Pavelić and his associates see, until now unknown, memoirs of a prominent Ustasha member Mijo Babić, *'Zašto sam danas u tuđini?'*[Why Today I am in Foreign Country] in HDA, Zbirka zapisa upravnih i vojnih vlasti Nezavisne Države Hrvatske i Narodnosolobodilačkog pokreta – 1549 – ZIG NDH – 1549, Group VI/Box no. 205/411. Further on HDA, ZIG NDH – 1549, VI/205/411.

30 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941* – 013.

31 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 81; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Sn Liber, Školska knjiga, 1977), 20.

32 Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 20; Jozo Tomashevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945. Part 2: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 32.

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death sentence meant that there was no turning back for him and that the only viable way for him to return was by achieving his idea of an independent Croatian state, a task and goal for which he now endeavored to achieve with any means necessary. For this he needed allies and he found one in Mussolini, who helped him organize his first followers and establish the Ustaša organization.

With the approval of Mussolini and financial aid of 70,000 lira, Pavelić started organizing training camps for his followers.[33] The first groups of Ustašas were organized in the small mountainous commune of Bovegno, in Brescia, Lombardy. As Slavko Kvaternik stated in his memoires '[t]he goal and purpose of this organization was a violent fight against the Yugoslav state and the creation of the independent Croatian state with Italian assistance.'[34] One member stated that the camps were necessary 'so that in case of a revolution taking place in Croatia, each one of us would know how to lead 250–300 people.'[35] During this early stage the Ustaša activities mostly consisted of relatively minor terrorist actions. However, there were three larger scale actions whose purpose was to destabilize the Kingdom and therefore create a space for the establishment of independent Croatia. These were the so-called *Velebitski ustanak* [Velebit Uprising] which took place in September 1932, followed by the two attempts on the King's life. The first, failed attempt on the King's life was organized in December 1933 with the plan of assassinating King Alexander during his visit to Zagreb, and the second one was the Marseille assassination of King Alexander and French minister of Foreign Affairs Louis Barthou on 9 October 1934. Despite their successful assassination of the King, this action did not bring the response and the outcome the Ustaša leadership hoped for.[36]

33 R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 284.

34 Nada Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika: sjećanja Slavka Kvaternika* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1997), 86.

35 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Materijal o JankaPusti* – 013.2. Further on HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Materijal o JankaPusti* – 013.2.

36 On the contrary, it brought about the isolation of the Ustašas in Italy were they were gathered and placed on the island of Lipari, while Pavelić was first placed in jail in Torino and later interned in Sienna. Eugen Dido Kvaternik was also arrested by the Italian authorities, and in November the German authorities arrested Mladen Lorković and Slavko Cihlar, but also decided not to extradite them to Yugoslav authorities. Sadkovich argues that the reason for this could lie in the fact that this Ustaša group in Germany was well connected with Alfred Rosenberg, through Kvaternik's brother in law Karl Potthoff as well as due to Kvaternik's contacts with the Nazis. Also, their training camp of Janka Puszt,

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During the period 1930 to 1932, Pavelić managed to organize his followers in Italy and the organization started publishing its first journal *Ustaša - vijesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca Ustaša* [Croatian Revolutionaries Herald], thus making its program public.[37] The journal justified any means necessary in the fight against the existing state declaring in February 1932 that: 'the GUN, REVOLVER, BOMB AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE are the idols which shall bring back the land to the peasant, the bread to the worker and the freedom to Croatia . . . . those are the bells which shall be a harbinger of a new dawn and of the RESSURECTION OF THE INDEPENDENT CROATIAN STATE.'[38]

It was during this early period that Pavelić wrote the two basic documents of the Ustaša organization, which determined its structure, internal relations, and aims. The first document was the 1932 *Ustav Ustaše, hrvatske revolucionrane organizacije* [Constitution of the Ustaša, Croatian Revolutionary Organization]. In its first paragraph, the document stated that the primary goal of the Ustaša is 'liberating Croatia from foreign domination by means of armed uprising (revolution), so that Croatia becomes a completely autonomous and independent state on all of its national and historic territory.' Paragraph three described its composition and organization, consisting of *tabor* [commune], *logor* [county], *stožer* [district], and the *Glavni ustaški stan* [Supreme Ustaša Headquarters]. Pavelić, as the *Poglavnik* [chief] of the organization, had all the power as head of the Supreme Ustaša Headquarters. The most interesting part is to be found in paragraph eleven, which outlined the oath which every member had to swear. By reading it, it is possible to delineate and determine the foundations and structures of the personal relations established within the movement. It is also possible to determine the tasks and expectations placed and demanded from each of its members once they were sworn in, as well as the movement's structure and hierarchy within. The oath which all members had to swear to is as follows:

> I swear by God almighty and everything which is sacred to me, that I shall follow the Ustaša principles and will submit to its regulations and will unconditionally perform all decrees of Ustaša leadership, that I shall,

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which they established in Hungary for the purpose of infiltration within the Kingdom and execution of various terrorist attacks, was closed. Sadkovich, *Italija i Ustaše*, 248.

37 The first issue was published in May 1930. See Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 115. They also published *Grič – hrvatska korespondencija* [Grič – Croatian Correspondence], Nezavisna Hrvatska Država [*Independent Croatian State*], *Croatiapress*, and others.

38 'Ropstvo je dodijalo,' *Ustaša – Vjesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca* (1932): 1.

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> every secret confined to me keep strictly to myself and never tell anyone anything.
>
> I swear that I shall fight within the Ustaša ranks for the achievement of the independent Croatian state and will do everything which the leadership decrees.
>
> If I am to violate this oath, I am to be, by the Ustaša regulations, punished by the death sentence.
>
> So help me God. Amen.[39]

This oath reveals the foundations of relations upon which the organization was formed and structured. Also, it tells us something about the nature of the relations established between the members and their leadership, in this case the *Poglavnik* as the head of the organization. Did the sworn members believe in their *Poglavnik* as a person who, to put it in Max Weber's words, possessed 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities . . . . regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader'?[40] The first question posed here is whether we can talk of the *Poglavnik* as having that 'special position that many fascist leaders eventually occupied in the political and psychological structures of their movements'?[41] Secondly, the establishment of the Ustašas regime in April 1941 undoubtedly created a leader cult during the regime period. Therefore, the question asked is whether the existence of a leader cult during the regime period was based on a previously formed charismatic relation and whether this cult can be taken as an 'evidence of the existence of an already instituted "charismatic community" or a means to the production of such a community, or actually both.'[42] Such an analysis can help determine the nature of established relations and their construction as a 'composite model of genuine and manufactured, that is to say a rationally pursued, process of charismatisation that was quantitatively and qualitatively different across the spectrum of fascist leaders and regimes

39 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 122–123.

40 Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Order* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 358.

41 Aristotle A. Kallis, 'Fascism, "Charisma" and "Charismatisation": Weber's Model of "Charismatic Domination" and Interwar European Fascism,' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion* 7 (2006): 25.

42 Kallis, 'Fascism, "Charisma" and "Charismatisation",' 28.

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in the interwar period.'[43] Therefore, when analyzing the relations established between the members and their *Poglavnik*, it is important to examine whether the *Poglavnik's* leader cult gained prominence only after the establishment of his rule, or whether his cult was primarily based on the already established charismatic relations and as such was transferred and developed during the Ustaša regime.[44]

During the 1920s and 1930s, Pavelić's main political idea and actions were oriented towards the achievement of Croatian independence. Pavelić used the idea of independence as his 'mobilizing myth' through which he established himself as its carrier, and thanks to which he succeeded in attracting his devoted followers. As one of Pavelić's associates Ante Moškov stated '[w]ith regards to our common and highest goal, the goal of the independent Croatian state, it was fostered and with all means strengthened our belief and obedience to the *Poglavnik* as a carrier and personification of this fight.'[45] Pavelić developed this 'myth' on the basis of predestination, historical determination, and an imminent need for salvation, all situated within a highly religious vocabulary. Similarly as religions preach the coming of the 'final day', of savior and salvation, so Pavelić preached the unquestionable, pre-destined fulfillment of Croatian independence and national rebirth. This rebirth – *palingenesis* – was to occur under the guidance of a charismatic leader, in this case the *Poglavnik*, who carries with him the idea and promise of salvation.[46] This national rebirth, led by charismatic leader and his movement, would therefore lead to 'the ethnic, racial, or religious purification' and was to occur 'through new forms of socialization based on a new ethical code of conduct leading to the creation of the new man, and the emancipation of the status of the respective people in international affairs.'[47]

It was the *Poglavnik's* followers who recognized and acknowledged him as the embodiment, the carrier of this fascist idea. Their recognition set him

43 Ibid., 27.

44 For more on the idea of state as a mobilizing myth and question of charisma and charismatisation in the Ustaša organization and regime see Goran Miljan, 'Karizmatični Poglavnik? Poglavnik i formiranje karizmatske zajednice – primjena i korisnost Weberova koncepta karizme,' *Historijski zbornik* 1 (2013): 121–147.

45 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH, *Dosje Ante Moškov* – 013.0.58. Further on HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Ante Moškov* – 013.0.58.

46 Robert C. Tucker, 'The Theory of Charismatic Leadership,' *Daedalus* 97, no. 3 (1968): 742.

47 Constantin Iordachi, 'Fascism in Southeastern Europe: A Comparison Between Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael and Croatia's Ustaša,' in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans. Volume Two: Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions*, ed. Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014): 404.

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apart from ordinary men and presented him as 'endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.'[48] Those who decided to join the organization had done so on a voluntary basis, pressed by the situation within the Kingdom but also by being attracted to the appeal of the 'myth' of independence and the *Poglavnik* as its embodiment. Becoming Ustaša meant obeying strict rules, conducts, actions, and the will of their leader, the *Poglavnik*. Therefore, the belief in the *Poglavnik* based on a 'voluntary subscription to the "myth" and the emotional belief in the leader's capacity to epitomize, further and pursue it that overcame rational objections or doubts'[49] was also present in the Ustaša organization. How seriously such established relations were taken can best be seen from reports and testimonies regarding the murders of several members due to their violation of the oath and expected conduct.[50] Thus, it can be argued that, during the initial phase of the organization's formation, its members passed through the process of 'persuasion and voluntary subscription to the mobilizing myth.'[51] In such established relations, rational thoughts and personal objections became almost non-existent. Even in the time of crises for the movement, for example after the 1934 Marseilles assassination of King Alexander, the psychological and emotional bonds created between the *Poglavnik* and his closest followers were not dissolved. Pavelić remained their *Poglavnik*, despite his mistaken calculations that once they assassinate King Alexander, the Kingdom would simply implode and an independent Croatian state would be established. On the contrary, his miscalculations caused several years of detention and hardship for his closest followers, which nevertheless did not rattle their firm belief in their leader and the idea he epitomized. A case clearly stated by Budak in August 1941, when he said that there can be only one truth connected to liberation and independence and that was that 'this was the deed of the Poglavnik . . . . others have participated as well, but without him – everything would, with more or less occurrences, wait for its leader.'[52] As shown, it can be argued that the *Poglavnik* was charismatised by his followers. The *Poglavnik*, whom his

48 Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 358.

49 Kallis, 'Fascism, "Charisma" and "Charismatisation",' 31.

50 See for example HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH, EUP – 013.1: 23–24, which brings data on the killings of the Ustaša members, and the same can be found in Šime Balen, *Pavelić* (Zagreb: Hrvatska seljačka tiskara, 1952), 19–21, and Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja* 1941, 264, see his footnote 825.

51 Kallis, 'Fascism, "Charisma" and "Charismatisation",' 30.

52 Mile Budak, 'Omladina je izvršila svoju dužnost,' *Ustaška mladež – prilog*, August 3, 1941, no. 5, 3.

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followers 'identified psychologically with the myth' and to whom they showed unquestionable loyalty, was thus able to 'pose the dilemma in terms of victory with him, or obliteration without him.'[53]

The second important document produced during this early stage were the *Načela Hrvatskog domobrana* [Principles of the Croatian Home-Guard], also known as the *Načela Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* [Principles of the Croatian Ustaša Movement] written and published in 1933.[54] This document reveals the ideological basis of the Ustaša worldview and, as Goldstein argues, a clearly developed ideological system.[55] The 1933 edition in the *Principle 1* stipulates the Croatian right for independence and emphasizes that 'The Croatian people are an autonomous national (ethnic) unit; they are the people by themselves.' It further stipulates that '[t]he Croatian people have the right to the wellbeing and happiness as a unit, and also as an individual Croat as part of that unit. Such happiness and wellbeing can be accomplished for the people as a unit and for individuals as members of that unit.'[56]

Another crucial aspect emphasized in the document is described in the *Principle 11* which stipulates that '[i]n the Croatian state and national affairs in a free and independent Croatian state no one can make decisions, who by his roots and blood is not a member of a Croatian nation.'[57] The *Principles* emphasized national and ethnic exclusiveness by arguing that only Croats can manage their own state, and that these Croats need to be such by their roots and blood. It is clear that Pavelić saw Croats as an independent nation, ethnically unique and thus easily differentiated from any other nation, presumably in contrast with the Serbian, Slavic one. The Croatian nation was envisioned as an organic unit based and formed on its roots and blood. Within such a community the individual was worth something only as long as he/she contributes and follows the needs of the whole community, the needs and goals set by the Ustašas. In sum, the *Principles* elaborated an exclusive national, ethnic, and state idea, within which an individual matters only as long as he/she is willing

53 Kallis, 'Fascism, "Charisma" and "Charismatisation",' 31.

54 The exact date of their writing remains unknown especially since their first editions did not have a publishing date. During the Independent State of Croatia the date of publishing was 1 June 1933. Also, they did not have the uniquely accepted title, but were published under various ones. I used the above title as the one appearing in the 1933 edition. The 1942 edition was edited by Danijel Crljen and published under the title *Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* (Zagreb: Tiskara Matice hrvatskih akademičara, 1942).

55 Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2001), 94.

56 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja* 1941, 126–127.

57 Ibid.

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to obey and live by the given rules and needs of a national community, a community as envisaged by the Ustašas, that is, the *Poglavnik*.

By the time of the 1942 edition their main goal, the independent Croatia, had been established. Therefore, this later edition contains an additional section dedicated to the description of the Ustaša state. This new *Principle 17* stipulates that:

> The Independent State of Croatia is totalitarian because it integrates, connects, and manages all sources of national strength, both spiritual and materialistic, because it takes onto itself a complete, total care for all national strata in their entire livelihood. It is totalitarian because it strives to monitor everything, to guide, manage, and arrange everything . . . . It is totalitarian because it takes equal care of a child to go to school, of a peasant to get his seeds, of a mother to give birth without worry, of a worker to have a safe job, of an old man to spend his last days in peace . . . . It is totalitarian because it strives to put the life and work of each individual in the service of common national benefit.[58]

The main Ustaša idea presented throughout was one of establishing Croatian independent state. Their totalitarian state, as envisioned by the *Poglavnik*, was to be governed only by Croats, that is, by the Ustašas as the role-models of courageous, warrior-like, 'new' Croat. The Ustašas considered and presented themselves as the elite entrusted with the task of 'liberating', rejuvenating, and repositioning of this 'new' Croatia on the map of what they saw was becoming the 'New Europe'. Therefore, when examining the question of charisma and charismatisation in the Ustaša organization, Iordachi was right in his call for the reconceptualization of charisma as 'an ideology that regards the nation as an elect community of shared destiny living in a sacred homeland which, on the basis of a glorious past, claims a divine mission leading to salvation through sacrifice under the guidance of a charismatic leader.'[59]

Ante Pavelić and Fascism

Another crucial aspect in the analysis of the Ustaša organization is the development and articulation of Pavelić's intellectual and ideological thought. This

58 Crljen, *Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta*, 112–117.

59 Constantin Iordachi, 'Fascism in Southeastern Europe,' 401–402.

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is important in order to discern political role-models as well as the broader ideological and political context in which fascism influenced the *Poglavnik* and his organization. Whether Pavelić saw fascism as a possible and desirable new political, social, and state system from the very beginning still remains open for further investigation, especially having in mind that it was not until the second half of the 1930s that he actually set up on an intellectual articulation of his political and ideological thought.

In 1936 Pavelić wrote a discussion document titled *Die Kroatische Frage* through which he tried win favor with the Nazi authorities.[60] Within it he strongly attacks the 'Versailles diktat' and argues that '[t]herefore it would be useful when the Croatian question would be given greater attention as one part of the revisionist and Danube problem.'[61] The same way in which Hitler stood on the position of an unjust peace treaty, Pavelić stood on the position of Croatia's unjust position in the Kingdom, and thus argued for its complete revision by any means necessary. Further in his discussion he mentions the differences between the Croats and Serbs by stating that '[h]istory, culture, and race made Croats a self-born national individual which can no longer be denied nor destroyed.'[62] Here we can also find, for the first time, something which will be repeated during the regime period as well as in the 1942 edition of the *Principles*, the Gothic origins of the Croats. Pavelić states that:

> Besides a small part of the intelligentsia, mostly of foreign blood, Croatian people rejected South-Slavism. These layers never felt as part of Slavdom, therefore they obviated, by their feelings, as something foreign and dangerous, Slavic and South-Slavic propaganda conducted by Prague, Moscow, and Belgrade. This fact provides us with further proof that Croats are not at all of Slavic, but of Gothic descent, a fact which had already been seriously discussed.[63]

60 Jareb says that this book was taken into consideration by the Germans only at the beginning of April 1941, and that it also remained unknown within Croatia until it was republished in 1942. Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja* 1941, 430.

61 Ivo Bogdan, ed., *Dr. Ante Pavelić riješio je hrvatsko pitanje* (Zagreb: Europa, 1942), 13–14.

62 Bogdan, *Dr. Ante Pavelić*, 15.

63 Ibid., 16. The idea of Croats being of Gothic origins was not an invention of Pavelić. This idea was first developed during the medieval period and as such was then taken up by various authors and intellectuals, such as for example Archdeacon Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006). For a more elaborated work on the appearance and development of this theory during the medieval period see a study done by Danijel Dzino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat: Identity Transformations in post-Roman and early Medieval Dalmatia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 99–104.

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Some of the ideas presented in this discussion served to indulge the Nazis in order to get their attention and possible support. Despite the fact that this was unsuccessful, it nevertheless shows us the direction towards which Pavelić heading. His claim to the Gothic origins of Croats served to position them higher within the racial hierarchy, since the Slavic race had lesser value in the Nazi racial hierarchy.[64] Pavelić further talked about the West/East border and Croats as its front men.[65] In order to further indulge the Nazis, in *Die Kroatische Frage*, Pavelić expresses strong anti-Semitism for the first time when he states that '[t]oday in Croatia all of the money and commerce are in the hands of the Jews . . . . It is in national turmoil that the Judah empire, money-strong and apparently loyal to state authorities, can get favor and obtain sympathy by those holding power.'[66]

Further in his discussion he touches upon the question of communism which he also connects with Jews in saying that 'Communism and Judaism are completely complementary and are working together against the national liberation of Croatia.'[67] Significantly it shows the development and further radicalization of Pavelić's thoughts and ideas after the Marseilles assassination. This fact becomes even clearer when reading his book *Strahote zabluda: komunizam i boljševizam u Rusiji i svijetu* [The Horrors of Illusions: Communism and Bolshevism in Russia and the World] written in 1938.[68]

It was in this book that Pavelić elaborates on the dangers of communism and attacks it as the product of the East which has 'always been the key point for emergence of peculiar and exotic doctrines, sight of prophets and messiahs, in search of a dream, promised countries, rivers of life, phoenix-birds and nirvanas.'[69] He connects this threat with the Jews, thus further immersing himself into the dominant ideological framework of anti-Semitism. For him communism was developed by 'Marx, the eastern Semite . . . . the modern

64 For more on the role and issue of racism in Nazi Germany see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power 1933–1939* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005).

65 Bogdan, *Dr. Ante Pavelić*, 16–17.

66 Ibid., 25.

67 Ibid., 26–27.

68 This book was first published in Sienna in 1938 in the Italian language under the pseudonym A. S. Mrzlodolski with a title *Errori a orrori* and was immediately confiscated by the Italian authorities. It was re- published in 1942 as well as translated into the Slovak and Bulgarian languages during the first half of the 1940s.

69 Ante Pavelić, *Strahote zabluda: Komunizam i boljševizam u Rusiji i svijetu* (Zgareb: Tiskara knjižare St. Kugli, 1941), 18.

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communism . . . descends from Germany, but not from the Germans but from the German Jew Marx.'[70] He was convinced that most of the Bolsheviks were also of Jewish origin when he stated that '[a]round the dictator Lenin, educated people and apostles have gathered, almost all of them Jews from Russia and the rest of the world.'[71] Once again we see the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism as having a key role in Pavelić's thinking on communism in Russia. For him, communism presented a danger because of its idea of world dominance which breaks with nations and nation-states,[72] and wishes to establish a world-wide communist movement.[73] In his ideological elaboration Pavelić left no suspicion about his support for fascism. He devoted an entire chapter to it in his book.[74] In this chapter, entitled *Fascism and Bolshevism*, he described fascism as the only viable system of beliefs which can defeat communism, and thus save Western civilization.

He despised democracy and liberalism as the cornerstones of Versailles system and as incapable of fighting the dangers of communism. He saw democracy as an old, dying system, and therefore regarded fascism as an idea, a system 'born in the West on the ruins of democracy which showed itself incapable of standing against bolshevism.'[75] For him '[f]ascism is not the antithesis of democracy, as this is usually being claimed, but its heir as the anti-thesis of communism, that is, bolshevism.' In order to prevent the influence and dominance of communism Pavelić stated that '[t]here had to come something new, something stronger and capable of fighting against bolshevism, capable of defeating it. And that had found its outcome in fascism.'[76] What this shows is Pavelić's awareness of the ideological and political reshufflings taking place in Europe. His disappointment with democracy and parliamentarianism, based on his own experience of it during the 1920s, caused him to accept and think about the new ideological and political possibilities he saw emerging at that time. Standing firmly on the radical idea of nation and nation-state as basic ideological and organizational units of society, he saw communism as representing a major threat to such views and to his own ideological and political principles. What also needs to be taken into account is the context in which this book was written. Pavelić wrote it in the midst of the Spanish Civil War,

70 Pavelić, *Strahote zabluda*, 17–19.
71 Ibid., 152–153.
72 Ibid., 169.
73 Ibid., 171.
74 Ibid., 261–273.
75 Ibid., 261.
76 Ibid., 261–262.

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which can be viewed as the first conflict, the first open battle between the two newly emerging, highly exclusivist totalitarian ideologies of communism and fascism in Europe. In positioning himself and his organization in this fight for this 'new Europe', as he saw it, Pavelić saw fascism as 'a unique idea of a new nationalistic state order, as well as the society, and therefore today it is a matter of world importance.'[77]

The Question of Support and Influence

Following the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, a brief period of rapprochement between the Kingdom and Fascist Italy began. Italy's reorientation of its Yugoslav policy had partly resulted from the fact that that the Ustašas actions had damaged Italy's international reputation. This rapprochement was sealed by the Italo-Yugoslav Political Agreement signed by Yugoslav prime-minister Milan Stojadinović and Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano on 25 March 1937. As Sadkovich says '[t]he Conclusion of the Italian-Yugoslav pact did not just secure Italy's positions in the Balkans but it also meant the *coup de grace* for the French system of alliances and the Little Entente.'[78] Article 4 of the Agreement stipulated that 'The High Contracting parties undertake not to tolerate in their respective territories, or aid in any way, activities directed against the territorial integrity or the existing order of the other Contracting Party.'[79] However, despite this article the Italians still kept close relations with the Ustašas, and some of their members were given the chance to return home. One important aspect in all this was the will of Stojadinović to destroy the organization under any price, even if that meant the return of some of its members back to the Kingdom.[80] The exact number of those who returned is unknown, but it is known that some of the *Poglavnik's* closest associates, such as Mile Budak, Jure Francetić, and others did return, and managed to strengthen the Ustaša support within the Kingdom.

Mile Budak made his return in July 1938[81] at which point he decided to work closely, perhaps even collaborate with Vladko Maček and his HSS.[82]

77 Ibid., 261.

78 Ibid., 276.

79 See Appendix A in Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934–1941*, 301–302.

80 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 437.

81 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52. Further on HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52.

82 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 517–523.

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In a report which Budak wrote when investigated by the Yugoslav communist *Služba Državne Sigurnosti* [SDS; Office of State Security], he stated that '[w]e advised our people, after and during the dictatorship, to become members of the HSS, since it was impossible for the HSP to remain politically active.'[83] The level of such infiltration is best seen through an example of the pro-Ustaša oriented Kruno Batušić, who in 1938 became the commander of Maček's personal guards, a fact mentioned by Budak during his interrogation as well as by the Italian diplomat Carlo Umilta in his report from May 1937.[84] According to Jareb, Budak's return 'substantially influenced the revival of the Ustaša organization and caused a sudden increase in their organizational and sworn members.'[85] Due to their different standpoints and Maček's policy of negotiations and agreement with Belgrade, Budak ended all relations, especially after the 1938 elections.[86]

In February 1939 Budak started publishing a weekly magazine called *Hrvatski narod* [The Croatian People] in which he openly propagated Ustaša ideas and positioned itself on the side of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. This can be detected by the articles published in *Hrvatski narod* such as 'Italija na straži Europe' [Italy Guards Europe],[87] 'Hitler',[88] 'Posljedice Versaillesa' [The Consequences of Versailles],[89] 'Susret revolucija: boljševičke, fašističke i nacističke' [The Meeting of Revolutions: Bolshevik, Fascist, and Nazi],[90] and others in which Budak and other authors strongly supported new political rearrangements occurring in Europe. While it is impossible to determine the exact numbers in which this newspaper was read, two moments are important in this period, which offer some clues on the Ustaša activities receiving more attention and more followers. After the Cvetković-Maček Agreement,[91] which sealed Maček's policies of negotiation and close collaboration with Belgrade, many became disappointed. Maček was attacked on the basis of trying to save Yugoslavia and thus for working against Croatian people and independent

83 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52.

84 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52., and Sadkovich, *Italija i Ustaše*, 313.

85 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 516.

86 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52.

87 'Italija na straži Europe,' *Hrvatski narod*, December 15, 1939, 1.

88 'Hitler,' *Hrvatski narod*, April 7, 1939, 6.

89 'Posljedice Versaillesa,' *Hrvatski narod*, May 5, 1939, 1.

90 'Susret revolucija: boljševičke, fašističke i nacističke,' *Hrvatski narod*, September 22, 1939, 1.

91 This was in fact a compromise reached between the two through which they tried to resolve the never-ending question of Croatian autonomy within the Kingdom. See Ljubo Boban, *Sporazum Cvetković-Maček* (Beograd: Štamparsko preduzeće Kultura, 1965).

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state.[92] Budak mentions that after this moment '[t]he supporters of the earlier Party of State Rights were dissatisfied with the Maček-Cvetković agreement and this dissatisfaction found its reflection in an increasing publication number of *Hrvatski narod* (80,000 copies), even though they were all members of the HSS.'[93]

There were also two other pro-Ustaša publications in this period, namely *Hrvatska smotra* [The Croatian Review] and *Hrvatska revija* [The Croatian Magazine].[94] How widespread the support for the *Poglavnik* and the Ustašas really was and how successful the propaganda presented within is hard to discern. There are no electoral results upon which it would be possible to calculate Ustaša popular support. But perhaps an indication of an increasing support can be found in the fact that the government of the *Banovina* of Croatia, created by the Agreement, decided to put a ban on *Hrvatski narod* in 1940 as well as to arrest Ustaša members and supporters such as Ivan Oršanić, Mladen Lorković, Juco Rukavina, Juraj Veselić and others.[95]

During the period of 1939–1940 Ustaša members started organizing various 'societies' which provided them with the ability to act and promote their ideas. One of the most successful of such societies was *Uzdanica* [Dawn]. It was formed as a cooperative society in 1939 and was therefore 'authorized for public work.'[96] In an already mentioned survey on the Ustaša movement it is stated that 'the Uzdanica became the headquarters around which gathered all those who accepted the Ustaša ideology and who recognized Pavelić as their leader.'[97] The same statement can be found in Budak's previously mentioned report during his investigation in which he stated that in the *Uzdanica* all members were Ustašas.[98] As a cover-up society, *Uzdanica* had a double task. Its prime task was to form branches across the country and thus gather as many members as possible as well as to dispatch the journal *Hrvatski narod*. The second task consisted in forming *rojeve* [swarms] across the country in which active supporters of the movement would gather. This led to the

92 Fikreta Jelić-Butić, 'Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti Ustaša do 1941,' *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 1–2, no. 1 (1969): 77.

93 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52.

94 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 538.

95 Jelić-Butić, 'Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti Ustaša do 1941,' 84.

96 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, 'O radu "Uzdanice" – Izjava Božidara Cerovski,' – 013.4. Further on HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, 'O radu "Uzdanice" – Izjava Božidara Cerovski,' – 013.4.

97 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941.* – 013.1.

98 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52.

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development of major Ustaša actions and organizations in various parts of Croatia. Another major task of *Uzdanica* consisted of spreading illegal leaflets and pamphlets which often, but not always, had irrelevant titles such as *Mlinska industrija u Hrvatskoj* [Milling Industry in Croatia], *Štakori i druge štetočine* [Rats and Other Pests], *Rastava od stola i postelje* [Separation from the Table and Bed] and others whose titles served as a camouflage in their attempt to avoid censorship and confiscation.[99] Besides *Uzdanica* there also existed other organizations whose role was to disseminate and propagate the Ustaša ideas in the Kingdom.

One such society was that of the *KAD Kulturno Društvo August Šenoa* [KAD Cultural Society of August Šenoa]. It was in this society that some of the later prominent members of the Ustaša regime were active, such as Božidar Kavran, Ico Kirin and others.[100] Very often its members came into conflict with members of the *Jugoslavenska akademska čitaonica* [JAČ; Yugoslav Academic Reading Club] formed by the Yugoslav government in order to represent student youth thus creating a situation in which the '[d]emonstrations and physical settling of scores were a common phenomenon.'[101] Another clue to as how widespread the ideas and support for the Ustaša was can be discerned from the slogans shouted at various student assemblies and elections even prior to 1938–1939. For example, the pro-Ustaša elements disrupted events by shouting '[w]e don't recognize Dr. Maček as a leader, our leader is Pavelić!'[102] During the elections at the Law Faculty in January 1937, which Franjo Nevistić won against his opponent from the HSS, his supporters were shouting slogans and phrases such as 'Long live our leader and chief Dr. Pavelić,' or 'Long live a free and independent Croatia.'[103] According to one report this was followed by the singing of *Lijepa naša* [Our Beautiful], the Croatian national anthem, banned by King Alexander, with their right hands outstretched.[104]

When *KAD August Šenoa* was dissolved in 1940, the Ustašas established the illegal *Ustaški sveučilišni stožer* [USS; Ustaša University Headquarters] whose district leader was Zdenko Blažeković, later prominent member of the regime

99 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941.* – 013.1.

100 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 470.

101 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, 'Kulturno akademsko društvo (napisao Božidar Kavran 1948. godine)' – 013.6.

102 As quoted in Pavlaković Vjeran, 'Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939,' *Historijski zbornik* 2 (2009): 496.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

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and of the Ustaša Youth organization.[105] Jareb argues that '[t]he strengthening of the Ustaša organization stimulated many pro-Ustaša orientated individuals and groups to act in public, usually by shouting political statements or speeches in which they openly supported Pavelić.'[106] One of the largest demonstrations of the Ustašas took place on 1 November 1940. According to the already mentioned survey, the Ustaša military formations counting all together around one thousand members visited the graves of HSP party members at the city cemetery in Zagreb and Šestine.[107] This was also mentioned by Božidar Cerovski during his interrogation.[108] What is also indicative of this growing support is the fact that during the second half of the 1930s graffiti reading *ŽAP – Živio Ante Pavelić* [Long Live Ante Pavelić] was written on buildings in the city of Zagreb.[109] According to the Yugoslav Secret Service reports, such graffiti also appeared in other smaller towns across the state such as in Pakrac, Daruvar or Grubišno Polje where, according to the report 'during the night, members of these [youth] sections would write ŽAP on walls of the houses, fences and other public places.'[110] According to other reports, the same actions also took place in the city of Dubrovnik, where after 1934 more and more slogans ŽAP started appearing,[111] and similar events also took place in the town of Vinkovci, in the eastern region of Slavonia.[112]

With this said, it is plausible to argue that after the Cvetković-Maček Agreement and the creation of *Banovina Hrvatska* as part of the existing Yugoslav kingdom, the idea of independence became even more prominent within the Croatian radical nationalist circles. As shown, in the period prior to 1941 the Ustašas managed to infiltrate, organize, and gather wider support among the people. As Budak mentioned during his interrogation '[a]s for the home country I emphasize that in all parts of Croatia we had our people, and supposedly in all army units as well.'[113] Such estimation is certainly far-fetched, but it does convey that they managed to position themselves and to make an impact

105 Jelić-Butić, 'Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti Ustaša do 1941,' 84; Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 560–561.

106 Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941*, 556.

107 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Elaborat: Ustaški pokret od 1918. do 1941.* – 013.1.

108 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, 'O radu Uzdanice - izjava Božidara Cerovskog' – 013.4.

109 Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, 98.

110 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Bivši ustaški aparat na kotaru Daruvar – Elaborat* – 0.13.0.10.

111 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Bivši Ustaški aparat na kotaru Dubrovnik – Elaborat* – 0.13.0.11.

112 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Bivši Ustaški aparat na kotaru Vinkovci – Elaborat* – 013.0.42.

113 HR HDA, SDS RSUP SRH – 1561, *Dosje Mile Budaka* – 013.0.52.

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in the Kingdom during the second half of the 1930s, especially in the aftermath of the Italian-Yugoslav Agreement. It was thanks to this agreement that they, otherwise organized in Italy and detached from a possibility of broader action and influence on wider population, managed to establish their movement as the only feasible force capable of delivering independence.[114]

Conclusion

This article presented and analyzed the key organizational and ideological features of the Ustaša organization. As we have seen, the Ustaša organization developed all the characteristics of 'fascist minimum' as elaborated by Roger Griffin,[115] that is to say, a call for national salvation through a complete and total regeneration of the nation (under the leadership of their charismatic *Poglavnik*). While it is possible to argue that the Ustaša organization could be defined as 'proto-fascist', as Roger Griffin suggests in the *Nature of Fascism*,[116] such a taxonomic verdict can only be valid for the period of its initial establishment, i.e. the late 1920s and early 1930s. Critically, the post-1933 period saw a major development and elaboration of the key organizational and ideological features of the Ustaša organization, as envisaged by its leadership. By analyzing these features, the relations established between the *Poglavnik* and his followers, and the Ustaša idea of future Croatian state, nation, and society, it is clear that the Ustaša organization had already transformed itself from a proto-fascist to a fascist organization well before Pavelić was installed as leader of the Croatian state by the Nazis in April 1941.

114 See Višeslav Aralica, *Matica hrvatska u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb:Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2009), 80.

115 Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 13.

116 Ibid., 120.

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