

The 'Ideal Nation-State' for the 'Ideal New Croat' Fascism and Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945

This lecture investigates and analyses the role of local actors and communities, more precisely, that of the Ustaša Youth officials and members, in the Holocaust during the Ustaša regime, the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945. The Ustaša belief in the imminent need for national rebirth and salvation of Croatian national community articulated the key component of fascism which 'depicted history as a life-or-death struggle between the national community and its perceived foes, redrawing the boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, and prefiguring a future ideal state of organic unity and purity'. From the outset of their regime, the Ustaša idea of 'national rebirth and cleansing' was given a practical note that was conducted through two parallel processes. On the one hand, their proclamation and implementation of racial and other discriminatory laws determined who can and cannot be consider a part of this newly established national community. On the other hand, the establishment of an all-embracing Ustaša Youth organization served as a platform for education and upbringing of the 'new Croat' – the Ustaša. Therefore, radical anti-Jewish, anti-Serbian, and anti-Roma policies, implemented from the outset, went hand-in-hand with the Ustaša policy of educating a 'proper', 'new Croat – the Ustaša.

By juxtaposing the discourse presented to the youth with the discourse of an imminent need for 'purification' and 'cleansing', this lecture will show how the Ustaša policies of mass murder, in this case of the Holocaust, were justified and presented to the youth. It will also show how members of the youth organization responded and reacted to the processes of expropriation and deportation of their colleagues, friends, and neighbours. While often disguised in daily newspapers and magazines, the Ustaša rhetoric and propaganda of 'cleansing' and regeneration presented itself in full in publications devoted to the youth, especially those sections which emphasized the future role of the youth as representatives of the 'new Croat' – the Ustaša. Thus, this lecture will also provide an analysis of the Ustaša ideological setting and its radical implementation on a local level in order to investigate how the local youth organizations and its members responded to this. The focus will be on comparative analysis of how the youth and local community responded to the fact that their neighbours, colleagues, and friends were arrested, expropriated, and deported to concentration camps.

This lecture is built on archival materials from the Croatian State Archive and local archives from the cities of Dubrovnik, Varaždin, and Bjelovar. In addition, numerous journals, weeklies, and magazines have been analysed and analytically examined in order to extrapolate and detect the propaganda and the discourse presented to the youth with regards to their present and future social and political role and purpose.