

McCormick, Rob: *Croatia Under Ante Pavelić. America, the Ustaše and Croatian Genocide*. London: I.B. Tauris 2014. ISBN: 9781780767123; 241 S.

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The title of Robert McCormick's book, „Croatia under Ante Pavelić“, seems to herald a foreign historian's fresh contribution to the bitterly divided and poisonous domestic historiography on the Second World War in Croatia. The polemics over the country's fascist collaborationists, the Ustaše, and the legacy of the communist-led Partisans were stoked during the run-up to parliamentary elections in November 2015 and continued after the right-wing coalition in power embarked on a series of decisions which limited media freedom, emboldened previously minor radical right parties, and estranged the country's minorities, especially those with traumatic memories of the fascist terror during the Independent State of Croatia (NDH, 1941–1945). The government's most controversial member, Minister of Culture Zlatan Hasanbegović, was himself a historian who specialized in the Second World War and was criticized for his open rehabilitation of the Ustaše, provoking not only protests from activists in Croatia but also calls for his resignation from international intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, the government suffered a no-confidence vote in June 2016, having lasted less than 150 days. One of the biggest scandals affecting Croatia's international image concerned the Jewish, Serb, and antifascist boycott of the official government commemoration at the Jasenovac concentration camp in April 2016 as a response to the new government's ambiguous position on the Second World War. In this kind of atmosphere, meticulous historical research by scholars spared the everyday political battles is needed more than ever on the highly contested period of the NDH.

Unfortunately, McCormick's book offers very little original research on Pavelić's Croatia, and in fact skirts the most contentious issues such as Jasenovac, the question of genocide, and the Bleiburg massacre. What the book does offer, however, is the previously

untold story of how the American government attempted to follow events in occupied Yugoslavia and the activities of Croatian émigré groups in the United States. In addition to adopting a less misleading title (i.e., emphasizing the Croats in America), the author should have concentrated on his strengths researching in US archives and developed a more in-depth analysis of how émigrés functioned during wartime, rather than attempting to tackle the much more challenging task of a narrative of the NDH, especially with almost exclusively English-language sources.

Although this is not the book it could have been, McCormick has done significant research in US archives and the chapters relying on these documents stand out as excellent contributions to the field. He shows how various Croatian émigré groups responded to Croatia's 'independence' under German and Italian control, and describes the efforts of the State Department to monitor the various individuals in the US who supported the newly established Ustaša regime, such as Ante Došen. These aspects of the book would have been stronger had there been a more systematic analysis of the émigré organizations and then their response to the situation in the NDH, but nevertheless McCormick has provided a solid overview of groups such as the Domobrans, the Croatian Catholic Union, and the Croatian Fraternal Union. There is also an interesting analysis of Croatian publications in the US and the responses of America's Serb community to disturbing reports of the mass murders committed by the Ustaše almost immediately after taking power. The last two chapters, detailing Ustaša leader Pavelić's escape to Austria, Rome, and eventually Argentina, also shed new light on American foreign policy towards Axis war criminals in the early stages of the Cold War. Although the US decided that simply being an Ustaša did not warrant transfer out of internment camps and over to the new Yugoslav communist regime (p. 146), known war criminals such as Pavelić were allowed to remain on the loose even when the Counter Intelligence Corps had located him under Vatican protection before his

<sup>1</sup> The government suffered a no-confidence vote in June 2016, having lasted less than 150 days and resulting in the dissolution of the Parliament.

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escape to Juan Peron's Argentina in november 1948.

The innovative chapters dealing with Croatian Americans and State Department responses to the Ustaša regime are unfortunately overshadowed by the very problematic parts of the book that actually attempt to deal with Croatia under Ante Pavelić. The author has not referred to any of the recent research (especially not in Croatian) on the NDH, there are numerous factual errors (for example, McCormick repeatedly claims the Red Army pursued the Ustaše in the final days of the war, and not the Yugoslav Partisans), and the book lacks a proper introductory chapter to outline the methodology or historical context of why the terrorist Ustaše were able to implement their regime so quickly (perhaps explained by the omission of classic works on interwar Yugoslavia by historians such as Ivo Banac, Alex Dragnich, J.B. Hoptner, and Dejan Djokić).<sup>2</sup> The author never explains that the NDH absorbed present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina (this is not even an entry in the index), and since the book lacks maps a non-expert would potentially be confused with claims that Ustaša „exterminations were taking a crushing toll, especially in the ethnically-diverse Bosnia“ (p. 89). Furthermore, although the author refers to genocide in the NDH a number of times (including in the subtitle), he argues that „a full discussion of this issue is well beyond the scope of this book“ (p. 198), relying primarily on German military reports and newspapers published while the war still raged for numbers of victims rather than consulting the extensive historian debates on the subject over the past two decades. There are also problems with diacritics and spellings throughout the book, along with a tendency to rely on non-academic language and simplified generalizations (characterizing Archbishop Šarić as a „rabid Ustaša disciple“ [p. 38], describing the NDH government as having only the „ambition to kill“ [p. 76], and labeling Franjo Tuđman as „an apologist for the NDH, [who] was at the forefront of rehabilitating the NDH“ [p.183]) which detract from the book's arguments.

In the current situation of entrenched historical positions in Croatia, the work of in-

ternational scholars on the Second World War is desperately needed, but unfortunately McCormick's contribution fails to deliver on the promise of its cover. Readers confronting these issues for the first time will likely be confused by the history of the NDH, while scholars in the region will be more frustrated by the monograph's problematic interpretations of the war rather than concentrating on the innovative chapters examining the US and Croatian-American perspectives. Further research by McCormick into the network of émigré groups in the US, including Serb organizations and perhaps a comparative analysis of other pro-Axis supporters, would be a solid contribution to the field which is weighed down by rival nationalist myths. This book has opened a new direction of research and previously unexamined archival material, but is unfortunately hampered by an overly broad scope rather than focusing on the author's research strengths.

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<sup>2</sup> Although each of these books have certain weaknesses and the authors various biases in their interpretation of Serb-Croat relations in Interwar Yugoslavia, they nevertheless help explain the interethnic dynamic that contributed to the tragic events during the Second World War. See Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca NY 1984; Jacob B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934–1941*, New York 1962; Alex Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia: Search for a Viable Political System*, Stanford CA 1983; and Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, New York 2007.