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BLANK PAGES OF THE HOLOCAUST: GYPSIES IN YUGOSLAVIA  
DURING WORLD WAR II

by

Elizabeta Jevtic

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master's of Arts

Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages

Brigham Young University

August 2004

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Elizabeta Jevtic

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERISTY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Elizabeta Jevtic in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographic styles are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

# BLANK PAGES OF THE HOLOCAUST: GYPSIES IN YUGOSLAVIA DURING WORLD WAR II

Elizabeta Jevtic

Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages

Master's of Arts

After a general overview of the persecution of Gypsies (Roma) during World War II, this thesis focuses on the situation of Gypsies on the territory of Serbia and Croatia.

The two republics are chosen because of their unique structures during the years 1941 to 1945. Both republics had puppet regimes set up by Germany; however, Croatia was an ally to Germany and strove to mirror the Third Reich in all its policies. The regime's head, Ante Pavelic, was known as one of the most brutal and merciless men on the territory of Yugoslavia, and with him Croatian paramilitary forces committed great atrocities in concentration camps established in Croatia. Serbia was divided up among Germany and its allies, and its racial policies varied depending on the occupying forces. In Croatia, all Gypsies were annihilated, but in

Serbia many survived because of the protection provided by local peasantry and occupying forces from Hungary, Bulgaria or Italy.

The thesis points at four main findings: (1) the negligence toward the Gypsies' plight and persecution; (2) the fact that, according to Nazi definitions, the persecution of Gypsies was based on their race rather than their style of living; (3) the fact that there were multiple concentration camps throughout the territory of Yugoslavia, with the most brutal camp at Jasenovac in Croatia; and (4) the fact that the Holocaust was far more than a Jewish phenomenon.

Examining the two regions and highlighting them, the thesis proves that the fate of Gypsies in German-occupied territories of Yugoslavia was the same as the fate of Jews, that they were persecuted under superficial excuses, but with racial sentiments as the primary motivation. This new material, along with little known facts, documents, and stories show how marginalized Gypsies have been since the end of the war, and how little scholarly attention has been paid to their suffering. These new and some unpublished materials also help depict the brutality of Jasenovac, the Auschwitz of Balkans, and prove that the atrocities during World War II were not committed only by German soldiers, but that they reached their peak among people of other nationalities as well.

Finally, the thesis claims that Gypsies deserve to be placed in the study of the Holocaust along side of Jews, and to receive the rights and remembrance that Jews have been afforded.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express appreciation to the Germanic and Slavic Department for allowing me to step out of the ordinary and do research of this kind, and especially for the members of the Committee, Professor Lyon, Professor Kelling and Professor Lundberg, who read and evaluated my work, giving me constructive criticism and feedback.

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I am especially grateful to my father, Milorad Jevtic, for spending countless hours collecting information, stories, maps, and encouraging me to finish this work. Finally, I want to thank my ancestors for their sacrifices, which enabled me to be here today.



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## **A very personal foreword**

It is a beautiful snowy morning. My school just celebrated the Christmas season, and I, as a director of the school's play, feel great and important. As I walk home from school with my friends, the snow shines on the heavy pine branches. My dark, black hair stands out as a contrast against the white ambience. The apartment building is in sight. My little group stops. We exchange a few funny, happy words when another group of schoolmates passes us. Suddenly one of the girls from that group shouts out in a provoking conduct: "Hey, you're wearing Santa's red coat. But, it looks like you stole it from the poor Santa, since its sleeves seem to be too short for you." The group laughs. I smile, thinking it is all meant as a joke. But she continues: "Isn't that the only thing Gypsies are capable of, stealing? Aren't you one too?" Confused and irritated, I glance at her, turn around and head to home, mumbling goodbyes to my little group.

As I open the door to the apartment, the smell of my mother's baking hits my nose. The warmth snuggles me in, and I feel a bit better. I enter the kitchen, still in my coat, backpack on my shoulders, cheeks and nose red from the cold of the winter day. I energetically seek my mother's attention. She is washing the dishes, gazing at them as if they are a piece of some precious memory stored in her mind. She turns to meet my look and tells me to take off my coat and get something to eat.

"Mom," I begin slowly "what does it mean that we are Gypsies?" Wisdom personified in the physical body of a big, cheerful woman stops doing the dishes, wipes her hands in a towel and helps me take off my bag and unbutton my coat. She still has that gaze, as if some precious memory is being recalled in her mind, that only she can see and feel.

"My coat sleeves are short. Girls were making fun of me, saying I stole it. But, I didn't steal it mom. They know I didn't." I think there is a tear in my eye, caused by the false accusations. There are in fact many tears, piled on the bottom of my eyelids, but I am trying hard not to show my hurt. She just smiles and looks at me.

"You know you didn't steal it and that is all that matters. I know you didn't steal it. That matters. You have Gypsy blood. Just as your brother and I have Gypsy blood. That means that we carry in us honor, heritage and the energy of thousands that have gone before us. That means that we laugh at the tides of time, standing anchored in a haven of diversity. It means that we are different and people fear us, because we dare to be different and cherish life. It means that we are an additional piece in God's marvelous mosaic and that we are here to stay."

## **Introduction**

I have Gypsy blood. Why not? I carry the voices and heritage of thousands within me that shout louder every day, whispering into my ears to tell their story. I have always known who I am, but only recently have I begun discovering who they were, those voices that beg for me to commemorate them.

World War II and the phenomena called Shoah, Porrajmos or the Holocaust have always fascinated me. I grew up listening to stories about my father's mother and her survival through the war years as a young teenager. The word *freedom* gained new meaning and depth for me each time my father told another story. Then I became a teenager myself. The turmoil and hatred escalated in my country, and suddenly my grandmother's stories became a reflection of my reality...Except that one half of that

reflection was missing. I was a Yugoslavian, with a Serbian father and a Hungarian mother. I knew much of the struggles my Serbian ancestors endured during World War II and the persecution of Slavs by Nazis. But I was not persecuted because I was a Serb; I was persecuted because I was not pure, because I had Gypsy blood. I spent my childhood with my mother's extended family. The little deals, smuggling, and love for adventure were part of the mess, and I laughed at how delightful and different my relatives were, but my mother always kept us at a safe distance from those deals. My brother and I were two white pearls among the beige pearl variety. We were in both worlds, yet belonged to none. And when the time of conflict came, the past persecution of Gypsies repeated itself. What was that past in the case of my Gypsy family and friends? How did my mother's side survive the Holocaust? What happened on the territory of Serbia and Croatia in the years between 1941 and 1945? Why are Gypsies able to laugh, love adventure, and act as if there never was a Porrajmos?

Very little is available on the topic of Gypsies during the Holocaust. There are three main obstacles, which make it difficult to access more detailed information.

First, many documents that existed in Yugoslavia have been destroyed by German troops or the puppet regimes which existed in both Serbia and Croatia. This was done mainly to hide the evidence of brutality and to hide the actual numbers of people who died in Yugoslavia during those four years. The immediate postwar destruction of any evidentiary materials, the passage of time, and the recent conflicts in the Balkans make it difficult for a researcher to find out what exactly happened in war torn Yugoslavia in World War II. Some documents and stories about NDH (in English translation the Independent State of Croatia), Partisans, and the Jewish plight exist, however, it remains

a little known fact that on the territory of Serbia and Croatia only fortunate Gypsies survived by hiding in the woods, or in the mountains. Some, less lucky, were deported to Auschwitz and other camps in Poland, Austria and Germany. Those least lucky were sent to Jasenovac.

The second obstacle, and a well known fact, is that Gypsies are not people of letters, but rather story tellers. Jews, known as the people of word, literate and highly capable of expressing their plight, have done a great deal to open the eyes of the world to their suffering in the ghettos, work and death camps. The voices of the Gypsies, however, have mostly been silent. The Jewish community has preserved much of its history by writing it down, publishing it and making sure the world hears and remembers the Holocaust. Gypsies who can write have chosen to assimilate into the regular population and forget their roots. Those that cannot write, share their stories only on rare occasions, because they are humiliated by the events, and the impact that they have had on the future of the Gypsies. For many Gypsy men and women, it is a taboo to speak about the event, which occurred.

The third obstacle is a lack of interest on the part of history and historians. Volumes of books and articles have been published on Jewish suffering, because there are enough people who care to see these books published. Roma and Sinti have not found many who will speak for them, and of those who do, most have a very limited echo. In his recent publications, Dragoljub Ackovic, a Roma (one of the Gypsy tribes) writer and author of books on the topic of Roma, and an editor of a Roma program in Belgrade, claims that:

The biggest "killing of the truth" about the Roma occurred during the genocide in World War II. Thousands of books, hundreds of thousand of texts, and millions of articles have been written on this last great world crisis and about the destruction of various nations during it [...] It is good that this has been done, because the truth, no matter how bitter, needs to be remembered. However, the truth about the destruction of the Roma population [...] has been deemed unimportant, has been forgotten and pushed away. In other words, it has been removed from the eyes and the ears of the public. Why? Because the action of hiding the truth fits the needs of those who have caused that destruction. The question whether the Roma themselves have a concern with that is not being posed. And how can it be posed when the great number of those who knew the truth are not alive anymore? Writings about who killed the Roma, when, how and why do not exist. Or so the "truth killers" would like us to believe (Ackovic 6, *my translation*).

Echoing Ackovic's words, the complete truth remains hidden, and many myths and legends still envelope areas of the Holocaust that only few consider to research. This seems to be especially the case with the events involving the Gypsies in the Balkan territory during World War II.

In addition to these difficulties I, as a researcher, have limitations in finding material and collecting documentation from original sources in Serbia and Croatia. This inability to conduct a detailed research of primary and original documentation adds a frustration in the findings. I am aware that if I had a chance of searching through the materials and archives in Serbia and Croatia, I could attempt to answer more questions, which will now remain only estimates. The passage of time further hinders the research,

since I am running against the time and only a few of the survivors of the Holocaust are still alive and willing to share their stories with me. I have tried to compensate for that by listening to stories told second-hand, by the next generation; however, these stories are often inadequate replicas.

Nevertheless, with all these limitations and frustrations, I was able to research the past of the Gypsies in Europe and in Serbia and Croatia. Many helpful hands and minds supported my investigation by searching and gathering information and data for me in Serbia, and I must acknowledge, without them, this would have been almost an impossible task. With that great help I am able to present the following chapters, which are by no means exhaustive, and which I hope spark further interest, investigation and data collection.

I realize that many might not even be aware of the situation of the Gypsies prior to the world wars, and use my first Chapter as a general overview of who Gypsies are, where they came from, and what they faced on the European soil before the National Socialists and before the Holocaust. In that chapter, I introduce some of the many laws which were in effect against Gypsies, showing how they were persecuted under “racial” prerogatives. I also explain the years of persecution, deportation to camps, and death these wanderers faced in the countries under Hitler’s fist. Only a few statistics are presented in this chapter to show how many Gypsies were thought to have lived in Europe in 1939, and to better show the percentages of death during the war years. At the end of the chapter I also show the statistics of how many Gypsies had been deported to Auschwitz, and what number and percentage of these came from the territory of Yugoslavia.

Chapter 2 is an exclusive account of Yugoslavia from 1941 to 1945. I give an overview of how Yugoslavia became involved in the war and what happened in the various regions. This is important to finding out how life was for the Gypsies, because whether they lived or died depended what region they lived in, or where they were at the time of the war. To better present this difference, I devote most of the chapter on Serbia and on the persecution of Gypsies (or the lack thereof), showing that Serbia implemented racial laws to various degrees, due to the fact that it was fractioned among Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria, and each of these regimes implemented the laws differently. Thus, Gypsies who were found in Vojvodina, under Hungarian occupation were barely persecuted, even protected somewhat and taken into registry as Hungarians rather than as Gypsies. This was not the case for those in lower Serbia under German rule. I also describe the puppet state of Croatia in a small section of the chapter, mainly to establish the difference between Croatia and Serbia. Both states were puppet regimes, however, Croatia was an ally, with greater support in the regime, while Serbian population showed greater resistance toward the puppet regime set up by Nazi Germany. As I researched the case of Yugoslavia I realized that there is much to be said about Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro. I acknowledge that I have not in detail examined all the regions in Yugoslavia, but used Croatia and Serbia as general models.

Most atrocities in Croatia are described in Chapter 3, which tells the story of the concentration camps at Jasenovac, according to some scholars possibly one of the most notorious camps of the Holocaust. Supported by witness accounts and multiple pictures from various sources, this chapter presents the brutal truth of Jasenovac and the Ustasha emotional involvement in the Holocaust. I recognize this chapter could have taken up all



the pages of my entire paper. My intent, however, is not to give a detailed picture and description of the things which occurred on a daily basis; rather, I want to draw attention to the immense and unnecessary pain, suffering, and torture which took place by sharing some of the stories and statistics. This camp was one in which even German officers and SS men lost their cool when they saw the ways and methods of treating prisoners! My task is to show why without sharing each and every grotesque detail.

In the final chapter, I take time to compare some statistics and discuss the question of the Gypsy Holocaust, and present ignorance of it. This chapter deals with two current issues that Gypsies have fought for since the end of the war. The first issue is the account of how many died, where they died, and who they were. I show the difficulty in assessing the numbers, due to lack of Gypsy registry in Yugoslavia, and also to the numbers game the two republics Serbia and Croatia have played for decades, in order to hide, exaggerate, or downplay the involvement and the number of deaths that took place in their countries, not considering that in this game, Gypsies are the ones who lost the most, not Serbs or Croats. The other issue is the ignorance toward Porrajmos, or the Holocaust of the Gypsies. Many scholars debate the question whether Gypsies were persecuted and annihilated due to their social standing or due to their race, as was the case with the Jews. To claim that it was not case of racial hatred would mean to privilege Jewish suffering, and to allow Gypsies to join the bandwagon of racial persecution would mean that Jews would have to surrender their claims to a unique plight and grant Gypsies allotment of reparation costs and victim rights.

In conclusion I summarize my findings of these chapters and offer my personal opinion, hopefully adding a voice for Gypsies' cause.

## **Projected results of the research**

As I began the research, I have been able to see some success in compiling information about the concentration camps in Yugoslavia of which little is known. These camps are mentioned by name only, and just one of them has been referred to, but only in reference to the Serbian population, not the Gypsies. One might think that no Gypsy ever died in the Jasenovac camp! But, even though the debate is still on, most historians agree that approximately 40,000 Gypsies died in this camp. In my research I have been able to find eyewitness accounts, which confirm that families and tribes of Gypsies died in the concentration camp Jasenovac. To me this is a great success, which accounts for 40,000 people we cannot find any records of anywhere.

Parallel to this is the heated debate about whether Gypsies were, like the Jews, systematically persecuted and annihilated due to their race. Many scholars of Jewish heritage, like Guenther Lewy, claim that the Holocaust is a unique racial persecution of Jews alone. In my research, however, I have found testimonies of officers, government officials, and even some religious heads, which testified of specific commands to *destroy all Jews and Gypsies alike*. I will show that documents proclaimed ethnic purity and condemned Gypsies as racially impure. The case of Yugoslavia can show that the Holocaust was a monstrous deed, and that the Jewish plight was not unique.

Another result I am slowly beginning to notice is bringing to light the differences in the fates of Gypsies in the territory of Croatia versus Serbia. I hope to answer the question of why Gypsies populated Serbia after World War II, while none were found in Croatia, and what the different historical backgrounds were that led to this phenomenon. These clarifications will help acknowledge the past as it was and help the victims and the

survivors who have been fighting to be acknowledged as such. The acknowledgment of Yugoslavian guilt and of Gypsies' sacrifices might be the tool to heal, and move on and leaving the past and racial prejudices behind.

Further, I am using texts in Serbo-Croatian, which I am slowly translating in the hope of helping some of the work of Yugoslavian Gypsy scholars find a stronger echo in their struggle to gain respect in the field of Holocaust writing and research. This can only happen if their works are published, mentioned, or pointed to more widely and in additional languages.

Finally, a personal result is that I will find what happened to my own family in the years of World War II and quell the inner-turmoil that has been with me since I began my research.

### **The potential impact, value, and importance of the project**

As I have shared my personal story in the foreword, I have slightly touched on the impact, value, and importance of this research. First of all, the academic value of the work is enormous. This will be the first research of its kind, since no book or essay has ever been written about the Gypsies' of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia! Nobody has taken the opportunity or the time to find the answers to the past, which seem to still hold both the Croatian and Serbian people in bonds of brotherly hatred. If I can show the truths and the myths about Gypsies, I will achieve two things. First, the stereotypes and prejudices about this race will be broken down and they will gain the respect they deserve. Second, the research will be a building block toward recognition and contribute to the debate of the racial persecution of Gypsies. Present recognition of the past will help alleviate the

suffering and humiliation many Gypsies endure today in Yugoslavia and in the rest of Europe.

The recognition of Gypsies and other victims as equals to the Jews might have a great political and social impact in the field of human rights, and also might be a springboard for future research and further contribution of scholars in unraveling the mystery that surrounds the history of the Gypsies in World War II and seems to continue in classifying them as second-class citizens. The paper can become a springboard for research about the present of minorities in Europe and their human rights (or the lack thereof). If the example of the Gypsies in past and present Croatia and Serbia can be investigated, then answers to some of the social, economic and political problems among various ethnic groups will be found, and future conflicts avoided or prevented.

Also, we owe this research to people who died without being mentioned in any book of the Holocaust remembrance. Their existence became a line or two in the books of remembrance that the Jewish written tradition wrote for its victims. They too, though Gypsies had names, feelings, emotions, thoughts and dreams worth commemorating.

Finally, this research is partly a personal quest to find out a part of my own history. As I explored and researched the general history of Europe, Yugoslavia and Gypsies, and as I listened to individual stories, I have gained a greater love for the people who were always looked down upon, and I wanted to convey that love. I have learned for myself what it means to be a Gypsy, and what my duty and responsibilities are as a Gypsy. Because of the love and appreciation I have gained for the Gypsy victims, I also want to add a word of caution. This research is full of tears, pain, and the inability to convey the plight and misery of human beings who were worth nothing to anyone in Europe, and who still fight

to be recognized as victims of the Nazi regime. If you, the reader, are willing to take this adventure with me, I warn you of the emotional roller coaster you will experience reading these pages and beg you to share your tears and pain with the voices of those who will speak to you. Maybe in a small way, you feel you have learned about the value of each soul and thereby helped change future for better.

## Chapter 1: Myths and truths about the persecution of the damned

Opre Roma	Roma arise
Gelem, gelem, lungone dromensa	I've traveled, traveled long roads
Maladilem baktale Romensa A Romale katar tumen aven	Meeting with happy Roma Roma from where have you come
E tsarensa baktale dromensa	With tents set on fortune's road
A Romale, a chavale	Roma, o fellow Roma
Vi man sas bari familija Mudardas la e kalo legija	Once I had a great family The Black Legion murdered them
Aven mansa sa lumniake Roma	Come with me, all the world's Roma
Kai putaile e Roma droma	For the Roma roads have opened
Ake viama, ushti Rom akana	Now is the time, rise up Roma,
Amen hutasa mishto kai akana A Romale, a chavale	We shall now rise high Roma, o fellow Roma

The anthem of the World Roma Congress, composed by Jarko Jovanovic to a traditional melody, speaks of the sad fate that has befallen Gypsies ever since they began wandering the world (Puxon 16). Their exact origin has never been fully revealed. However, most historians agree that Gypsies came from India, in an attempt to flee an enemy:

Die genaue Herkunft der einzelnen Sinti und Roma Gruppen kann von der Wissenschaft nicht eindeutig bestimmt werden. Einigkeit besteht lediglich darin, den Nordwesten Indiens als gemeinsame geographische Wurzel der Sinti und Roma zu betrachten. Genaue Daten zur Auswanderung und zu den

eingeschlagenen Wanderwegen gibt es nicht. Die Wissenschaftler sind hier auf Rückschlüsse und Hypothesen angewiesen, die umstritten sind (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung 8).

Some historians claimed Gypsies were of Mongolian origin, while others debated possible kinship with Egyptians, but research on the Roma language “proved that the Roma tribe came from India, actually from northwestern Pakistan Punjab area. It is assumed that their name, Roma, which means people, a nation, stems from the older Loma or Doma, the names used in Persia and Armenia to characterize Roma tribes” (Ackovic 27, *my translation*).

According to a legend told around fire, Gypsies were a tribe who lived next to an Indian maharaja in peace and mutual understanding. As years passed by, a wise man spoke to the maharaja and prophesied of his family’s total destruction but added that the Roma tribe would survive. Hoping to rescue his daughter, the maharaja begged the Roma tribe’s chief to take her and take care of her as if she were his own, which he did. However, when the chief died, it was his son’s turn to marry and take his father’s place. But, the only woman that pleased the young man was the maharaja’s daughter who he held as his sister. When he found out who she was, he was cautioned to keep her identity secret, in order to protect her from the enemy. The legend goes on to describe the fights and divisions which occurred among the tribe because the young man married the beautiful Indian daughter, and how he and his followers left their home and were forced to wander forever (Federal Ministry of ethnic and minority Committees 2001, *my translation*).

How much of this legend is close to the truth can only be speculated. The legend could serve as an explanation of the wanderings of various tribes and their differences in name, culture, and approximation of when they arrived on the European continent and where they came from. Even though the name Gypsy has been used collectively to name all these various groups, the tribes distinguish themselves by using the names of two of their tribes, Sinti and Roma:

Sinti and Roma is the ethnic group's own preferred nomenclature, although there are other smaller groups of Roma living in Germany belonging to other tribes such as the Kalderash or Lalleri. The term 'Rom' (plural Roma) is taken from Romani language (which evolved from early modern Indo-Aryan) and means 'person' (Tebutt xiii).

The 'Rom' has been widely adopted to mean a Gypsy; however, there are differences between Sinti and Roma:

Heute leben etwa acht Millionen Roma in Europa, die meisten in Südost, Osteuropa und Spanien. Roma leben aber auch in allen amerikanischen und weiteren außereuropäischen Ländern. Die Sinti sind eine der zahlreichen Gruppen dieses indischstämmigen Volkes; nämlich diejenige, die seit Jahrhunderten im deutschen Sprachgebiet lebt und mit deutscher Kultur, Sprache und Geschichte eng verbunden ist...Die Roma weisen erhebliche kulturelle, soziale, sprachliche, historische und regionale Binnendifferenzierungen auf; die zahlreiche Gruppen grenzen sich mit unterschiedlicher Intensität gegeneinander ab. Gleichwohl können auch Gemeinsamkeiten benannt werden: eine dieser Gemeinsamkeiten ist die Existenz indischer- und anderer- Elemente in Kultur und Sprache, die seit



nunmehr 600 Jahren in Auseinandersetzung mit den regionalen oder nationalen Kulturen Europas immer wieder neu verarbeitet und zur eigenständigen Kultur umgeformt werden. Die Roma sind deshalb nicht bloß soziale Randgruppe, sondern zugleich integraler Bestandteil der europäischen Kulturen (Reemtsma 8,9).

There still exists confusion in written works over the term that should be used. The collective term, Gypsies, will prevail in this paper, because it is the most common, most collective, one that needs positive attachment, and so that ‘Gypsies’ will be connected with the words plight, sacrifice, family, love, and people.

Gypsies, since they left their home in India, have been wandering, living a nomad life style, seeking for centuries to stay close to nature, and their customs, and beliefs, and to share of their love for family, and the earth. They have always been even less popular than Jews due to their reputation as poor, “illiterate beggars and petty thieves” and they were “unwelcome everywhere” (Niewyk 2). Dragoljub Ackovic, a writer and president of the Roma Organization in Yugoslavia, offers a possible cause for their continual movement:

They were always “guests from nowhere,” accidental passers-by, travelers with a purpose. It is said that they were a minority in India as well, and that as such they were not highly regarded. Maybe this is due to the caste system, though we can’t tell if they belonged to the lowest caste system. When the great conquerors invaded their lands the Roma tribe “unglued” their possessions and tents from the land in which they never took roots in the first place and began their travels like leaves carried by the wind (Ackovic 4, *my translation*).

Gypsies themselves would not have considered a life of continual wandering a feature characteristic of their race, but rather were forced to adopt the nomadic style and abandon every place they approached and attempted to recognize as their new home:

Contrary to the popular *gadjo* (non-Roma) conception, a Roma is not essentially a nomad. Most certainly they do not think of themselves as ‘wandering Gypsies,’ an invention of romanticism. On the other hand they are historically linked with frequent migrations over great distances... Many Roma, if they were not forced would make only a few moves a year. Change of location is mainly motivated by economic considerations, but an appreciable amount results from being moved on by officials (Puxon 6).

In their continual wandering, Gypsies moved further away from India, and by the 1200s they began to spread through out the European continent. They brought rich traditions of woodwork, music, and story telling, three features which greatly helped them survive in their new surroundings and communities:

In drei Bereichen der menschlichen Kultur berufen sich die Sinti und Roma auf eine eigene Tradition, die weiterzupflegen ihr Anliegen ist: Im Handwerk, in der Musik und in der Erzählkunst... Ihre künstlerischen und handwerklichen Berufe reichen auf eine Jahrhunderte alte Tradition zurück, die es nicht nur zu erhalten und zu pflegen galt, sondern die auch bereichert und weiterentwickelt werden sollte. Diese Tradition wurde in der Regel in den Familien weitergegeben, ergänzt durch eine allgemeine Fortbildung und Weiterentwicklung... Die Musik der Sinti und Roma - das ist vor allem die Musik der ungarischen Sinti und Roma... Nicht an Schulen oder Universitäten erlernten die Sinti und Roma ihre musikalischen

Fähigkeiten, sondern sie entwickelten sie aus der Tradition ihrer Familien. Ihre Musik entstand aus der Kunst des Hinhörens und der augenblicklichen Improvisation. Kaum einer der großen Sinti und Roma Musiker konnte Noten lesen und schreiben...Die Erzählkultur der Sinti und Roma verdient besondere Aufmerksamkeit, da sie einen Einblick in das geistige und soziale Leben der Sinti und Roma erlaubt; sie gibt Aufschluss darüber, wie sich Sinti und Roma selbst und die Mehrheitsbevölkerung sehen und erleben. Das Erzählen hat eine lange Tradition und gehört zu den Identitätsbildenden [sic] Faktoren der Sinti und Roma. Denn als eine im Wesentlichen schriftlose Kultur dient ihr die mündliche Überlieferung als einzige Möglichkeit, Tradition und Erfahrung zu bilden und weitergeben...In [d]eren Augen ist eine Familie gesegnet, wenn sie ihre Alten lange bei sich haben kann. [Die] Familien sind stolz auf ihre Alten. Denn Träger der Überlieferung in der Lebenswelt der Familien sind die alten Menschen. Und wenn alte Menschen erzählen, dann ist ihr Erzählen durchdrungen von eigener Lebenserfahrung und gereifter Lebensanschauung (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung 8,9,11).

Because they never owned land or had their own military or government, Gypsies were independent, and as such came into communities willing to share their knowledge, craftsmanship, and music without any economic or political prerogative in mind. But, after some time, the dark skinned people, who always lingered around in the fields stood out, could not integrate with the common crowd, and awoke suspicion. Stories began to circulate all over Europe, suspicion grew into fear and fear into prejudice, and the result was “die rund 600jährige Geschichte der Sinti und Roma in Mitteleuropa, *die* von

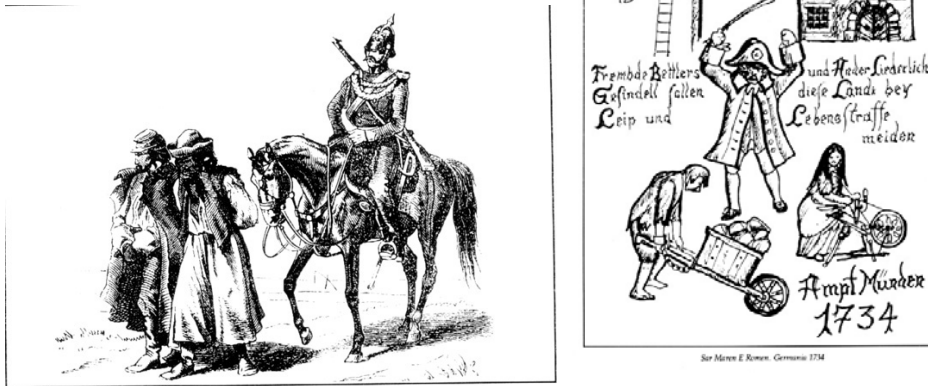
Anbeginn an eine Geschichte der Verfolgung, der Diskriminierung und Entrechtung, des versteckten und offenen Rassismus und der Kriminalisierung *war*“ (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung 18, *italics added*). Many intellectual heads of Europe did not hesitate “to claim that in the veins of Gypsies boiled vampire’s blood, as well as of Neanderthals” (Ackovic 51, *my translation*). Ian Hancock, a professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Texas and the U.S. representative of the International Roma Union to the United Nations, explains the multiple reasons for the centuries-long prejudice, discrimination, and persecution of Gypsies on the European soil:

The reasons for anti-Gypsyism are complex, and are the result of several different factors coming together over time... Briefly these are (a) that because the first Roma to arrive in Europe did so at the same time as, and because of, the Ottoman Turkish takeover of the Christian Byzantine Empire they were therefore perceived to be equally a threat; (b) the fact that Roma were a non-white, non-Christian, alien population (c) the fact that Roma have never had claim to a geographical territory or have had an economy, militia or government, and (d) the fact that culture itself maintains a strict social boundary between Roma and the non-Roma world (2003:3).

In other words, because they did not have military power to back them up, nor any form of government to be recognized as an independent entity, Gypsies became easy prey as scapegoats for the complex and violent societies of Europe. Some, in order to avoid harassment and further persecution, attempted to integrate by becoming merchants or wood carpenters, landowners, or musicians. It was said that the locals liked Gypsies’ dark skin and that their musical talent was well accepted, because it helped the locals forget

the wounds of the bare existence for an evening. During the day, however, the life was different. Unable to create harmony with their new surroundings, the majority of Gypsies chose to remain nomads, live in forests, and keep close to their family and tribe. Those who were too proud lived on the outskirts of society, always moving from one place to another, never settling down, never growing roots, never registering or establishing solid ties with the city and its inhabitants. They were called vagabonds, infiltrators, or spies. In some European countries they even became legal prey. In early and mid 1500s most European countries already implemented “Gypsy hunts,” or established laws to deport, ban, or imprison Gypsies found on their soil (Tanner 1997):

Fear and suspicion sent them down that slippery slope until their standing was such that the European gadje (non-Roma) chose to deal with the Roma in the following ways: expulsion, repression, assimilation, sterilization, and later, extermination. Repressive laws and expulsion orders reinforced their nomadic lifestyle. England, France, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, for example, expelled the Roma. Those who managed to stay behind faced a threat of being beaten or hanged. In parts of Europe, killing a Rom was legal. In early eighteenth century Germany, the Germans held "Gypsy hunts" during which they tracked down and killed the Roma. Sometimes, forest fires were set to drive them out of hiding, forcing them to face either death by fire or death at the hands of their hunters. Also, some areas tolerated the whipping and branding of Roma women. The gadje (non-Rome) took Roma children and placed them permanently in non-Gypsy homes, destroying Roma families (Miller 1998).



**Figure 1: (l) Gypsy hunts took place at various stages in history (this particular picture depicts a hunt in Germany, printed 1861), (r) some under parole “Fremde Bettlers und ander wiederliche Gesindell sollen diese Lande bey Leip und Lebensstraffe meiden,” 1734 (courtesy of the Roma Center for Public Policies).**

In this whirlpool of persecution Gypsies continued to gather their tents and belongings and wander to the next village, town, border and land. In their wanderings, as they passed Hungary in 1761, the Queen of Hungary decided to grant them the status of “New Hungarians,” and to outlaw Gypsy slavery and hunts:

They were given tools, seed, and animals for farming, despite the fact that they had never shown any interest in farming. The Romani language was outlawed, and they were not permitted to trade horses or to sleep in tents. The Queen's son and successor carried on and implemented his mother's policies. Nomadic communities were forced to settle, children were required to attend school and go to church. Adolescent Roma were taken from their families to learn trades. Roma music was prohibited, except on special holidays. All these measures failed, however, and by the nineteenth century the Roma had gained a certain amount of

freedom (Tanner 1997). Because of their constant need to move, most Gypsies could not be forced to adopt the enforcement laws.

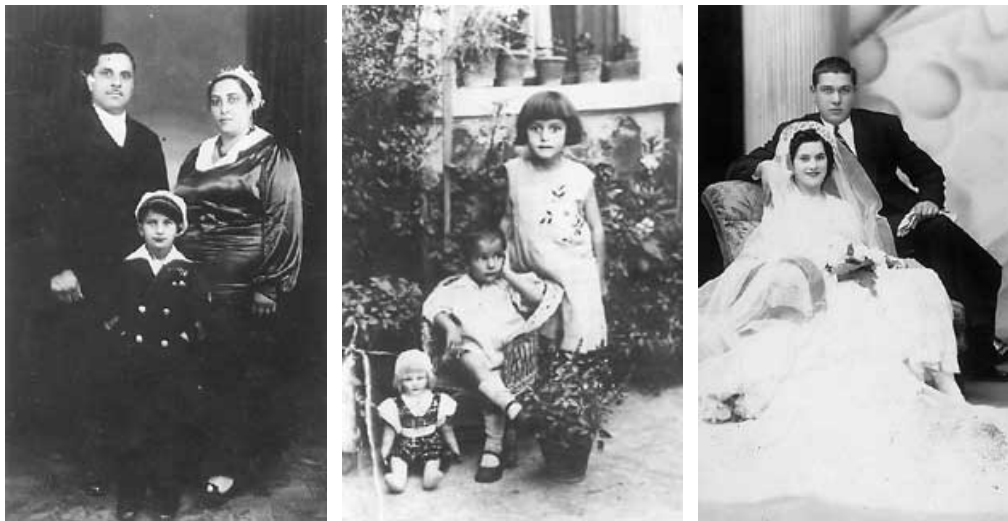


**Figure 2: A Gypsy family on a move. This lifestyle sentenced many families to death (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

But for the most of them, the wide open fields, and the thick forests of Hungary and its territories provided a possible home. Some stayed in the heart of Hungarian territory and settled there, some kept moving, trying to find a piece of land to call their own. By the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gypsies had settled in various countries throughout Europe. In most countries they were despised and rejected, and had very little or nothing. In a few, however, they were accepted and granted some liberties. These liberties and rights helped the integration process and in these lands most Gypsy populations differed only in skin color from the “natives.” Romanian, Hungarian and Yugoslavian territory proved to be the lands best suited for the Gypsies, due to their efforts to grant Gypsies freedoms and rights. These lands had already noticed the dark skinned people toward the late 1200s and recorded their movement in local official documents:

The Roma of the southern Slavic lands and Albania entered the region in much the same fashion, as did other Gypsy groups in the Balkans during the middle Ages. The first recorded mention of them in the region was in Macedonia in 1289, though, like many early accounts about the presence of Gypsies in the Balkans, these tales are often shrouded in myth... The first concrete evidence of Gypsies in the southern Slavic part of the Balkans comes in a document from the Republic of Ragusa, now the city of Dubrovnik plus several islands to the northwest in Croatia, on November 5<sup>th</sup> 1362 (Crowe 195).

The culturally diverse lands welcomed yet another race with little notice, but also with fewer prejudices, and “Gypsies were not persecuted as much in Balkan lands as in Western Europe” (Ackovic 28, *my translation*). Wandering caravans that made it into the Balkan lands pitched tents, looked at the land and at nature, and decided to stay.



**Figure 3: A shop owner from Nish, Serafetin Jasic (1899-1963) with his wife and son, date of the photograph unknown; a girl and her brother in front of their house in Nish (lower Serbia), picture taken in 1934, “Serbian bride” with her husband, picture taken in 1940 ( *courtesy of Bahtalo Drom Roma TV and Radio station*).**



Most Gypsies settled in lower Serbia, even though some laws, such as the “Regulation of the Serbian Principality of 1835” curtailed some of their freedoms, and forced them to give up their nomadic lifestyle. Others settled in the territories of Kosovo, Macedonia or in Vojvodina, while a smaller number wandered off toward Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Slovenia. Many caravans stopped in Montenegro, one of the few regions in the Balkans, which did not persecute them and, as early as 1427, even established a law to protect the wandering caravans. In 1829 this law was reinforced under the slogan: “None should touch the caravans, but let them go where the road takes them” (Ackovic 57, *my translation*). Those who lived on the territory of Serbia continued their craftsmanship, such as woodwork, became merchants (usually dealing with horses), or remained faithful to their love for music and entertainment. They had land and property; their children received education and served in the military side by side with the children of the natives. In time, ““Bijeli” or white Gypsies would come to “deny their Gypsy origin,” and began to marry with the non-Gypsy population, which paved the way for their integration into southern Slavic society” (Crowe 199). They were respected; however, it was not known that their heritage was Gypsy. Often it was safer and brought more profit to keep that secret. Most census forms until 1948 in Yugoslavia did not even show a rubric “Gypsy,” and Gypsies chose to remain silent before authorities knowing the fickle nature of laws circulating around Europe.



**Figure 4:** A salesman Nazif Useinović with wife Nasifom, their son Šefitom, daughter in law Jelduzom, daughter and granddaughter Menekšom, taken in 1919 and another picture of a Roma woman, name or date unknown ( *courtesy of Bahtalo Drom Roma TV and Radio Station and Nenad Jasic*).



**Figure 5:** Orchestra in Ribarska Banja (lower Serbia) between the wars (from left to right: Demir, Nedžip, Salija, Alija, Radovan, Kalča i Šefit); a picture of a merchant Osman Balic (1880-1945) and his wife, taken in 1905 (*courtesy of Bahtalo Drom Roma TV and Radio station*).

### **Final Solution and the Question of Gypsies:**

Though many Gypsies attempted to integrate, and though many turned from their traditional way of life in tents, woods and the outskirts cities, their dark skin and low status in society branded them. “Scholars in Germany and elsewhere in Europe were writing about Roma and Jews as being inferior beings, the excrement of humanity”:

In a society that was becoming increasingly urbanized and industrialized, Gypsies had to abandon some of their old trades, and many became impoverished and dependent on local welfare. Still, they resisted becoming wage laborers as well as they could. Industrial production displaced the making of articles for hawking and many turned to peddling machine-made goods brought from wholesalers, moving from village to town. Most of them became sedentary during winter months, but, following seasonal occupations, they continued their independent and nomadic way of life during the summer (Lewy 4).

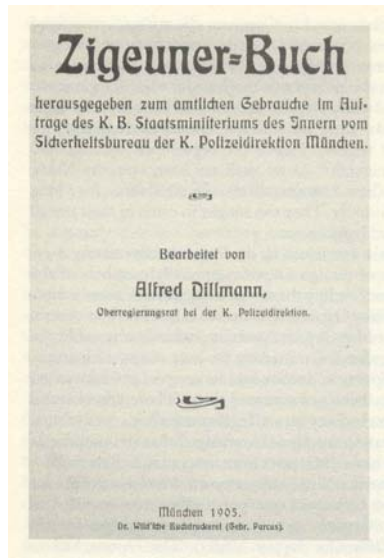
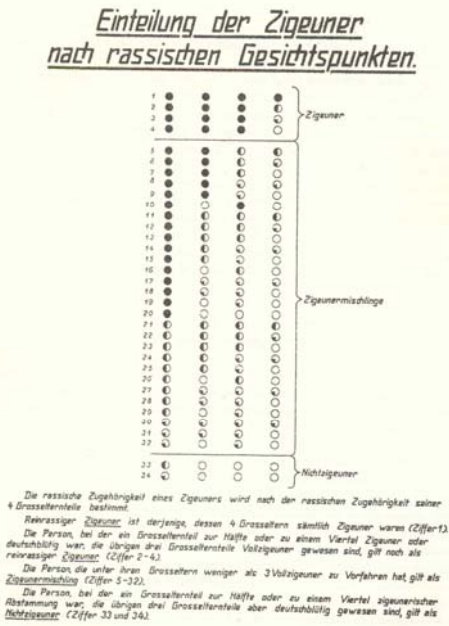


**Figure 6: Lieutenant Memed Memedovic, a musician by profession, played for the king before WWII, picture taken between the world wars; a military orchestra, picture taken in 1954 (courtesy of Bahtalo Drom Roma TV and Radio station).**

Their refusal to completely give up their freedoms and way of life was considered heretic in Germany, because “they were breaking many of the Hanseatic laws which made it a punishable offence not to have a permanent home or job, and not to be on the taxpayer's register” (Hancock 1997). In accordance with intellectual advancements came new sets of prejudices. In 1899 Houston Chamberlain published *The Foundations of the*

*19th Century*, which advocated the building of a “newly shaped ... and ... especially deserving Aryan race.” This “ was used to justify the promotion of ideas about German racial superiority, as well as any oppressive action taken against members of ‘inferior’ populations” (Hancock 2003:4). In that same year, the ‘Gypsy Information Agency’ was set up in Munich under the direction of Alfred Dillmann, which began logging data on all Gypsies throughout the German territory. A few years later in 1905 the results were published in the *Zigeuner=Buch*:

Dillman issued a compilation of all the data collected until then in a publication called *Zigeunerbuch*. In addition to all relevant laws and administrative regulations affecting Gypsies, the Gypsy Book included 3,350 names and more detailed information about 611 persons; 435 individuals were classified as Gypsies, 176 as Gypsy-like itinerants. It identified 477 persons having a criminal record, most charged with petty crimes such as begging, not having a license to carry on an itinerant trade or theft. The book was printed in edition of 7,000 copies (Lewy 6).



**Figure 7: Scheme for the racial classification of Gypsies according to the ‘racial makeup’ of their four grandparents: depending on the number of pure Gypsy grandparents, one was classified as pure Gypsy (four grandparents Gypsy or where one grandparent was partially Gypsy and the rest pure), mix Gypsy (one with less than 3 grandparents pure Gypsy), and not Gypsy (one half or one-fourth Gypsy of a single grandparent, while other 3 grandparents German ) (courtesy of Bundesarchiv in Berlin) and title page of the Zigeuner-Buch issued by the Munich police in 1905 (courtesy of Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in Munich, both pictures extracted from Guenther Lewy 44, 6).**

The purpose of the nearly 350 pages long research was to identify, by name and picture, all Gypsies as a “plague” and a “menace” against which the German population had to defend itself using “ruthless punishments.” The book also “warned of the dangers of mixing the Roma and German gene pools. Dillmann’s ideas about ‘racial mixing’ later became a central part of the Nuremberg Law in Nazi Germany” (Hancock 2003:4). The book also attempted to settle the long debate about the classification of Gypsies as a people, race, or a nation, since some who had assimilated and integrated were living in mixed homes, while others “roamed” around in their caravans. It was suggested that all people who were classified as Gypsies according to the teachings of ethnology on racial characteristics of a Gypsy, as well as all who roamed around like Gypsies, were to be

persecuted, and special caution was to be taken when coming in contact with them. Their racial qualities and lifestyle made them “unsafe:”

The fact that the German states had no uniform legislation dealing with the Gypsy “problem” made it somewhat easier to evade the most stringent controls. Each jurisdiction sought above all to get rid of its own Gypsies as quickly as possible; in practice this meant that Gypsies were continuously being pushed across borders. In order to put an end to this situation, in 1911...*various representatives were invited* to discuss united action. Not surprisingly, the conferees had differences of opinion...Eventually an agreement was reached on a compromise formula: Gypsies, in the eyes of the police, are those who are Gypsies according to the teachings of ethnology as well as those who roam about in the manner of Gypsies (Lewy 7).

During the years between the wars, the life of Gypsies in Yugoslavia became more balanced and stabilized. As part of regional communities within Yugoslavia, Gypsies prospered and embraced the idea of belonging to a land and people, and they pledged their loyalty to the kingdom. They fought in World War I and supported the homeland, and since then “*they* played an active role in the war in Serbia and suffered heavy losses in the conflict as a result. While no statistics are available, indications are that Rom civilian and military deaths were high” (Crowe 211). Because they pledged allegiance to Serbia, Gypsies felt it their duty to share the fate which fell upon the Serbian people, and, though hard times characterized the years between the two World Wars, and “despite the changes and chaos in the Balkans at the end of World War I, Gypsy life remained vibrant...Roma music, for example, remained central to Serbian life

and reflected, particularly in the years after World War I, the relief felt by all after the war's end. The Roma were affected by land reform efforts in Yugoslavia and began to settle (similar efforts had taken place earlier in Serbia)" (Crowe 213, 214).

In the rest of Europe, laws against Gypsies and Jews got worse and tightened as the years elapsed. Soon after the World War I, in 1920, Gypsies were forbidden to enter parks and public baths in any German city. In 1925 a conference on "The Gypsy Question" was held in Bavaria by the Bavarian Ministry of Interior, resulting in laws requiring unemployed Roma to be sent to work camps "for reasons of public security," and for all Roma to be registered with the police. After 1927, all Roma, even children, had to carry identification cards, bearing fingerprints and photographs. In 1929, *The Central Office for the Fight Against the Gypsies in Germany* was established in Munich, and in 1933, just ten days before the Nazis came to power, government officials in Burgenland called for the withdrawal of all civil rights from the Roma people (Hancock 1997). However, all these measures still left the authorities unsatisfied, and further racial laws were issued, to set Gypsies and Jews apart as a race:

Bereits im Jahre 1931 hatte eine Stelle der SS in München mit der Erfassung der „Juden und Zigeuner“, der beiden so genannten „außereuropäischen Fremdrassen“, begonnen. Vom Beginn der NS-Herrschaft an, wurden Sinti und Roma ebenso wie Juden aus rassistischen Gründen verfolgt und ausgegrenzt. Gleich 1933 verlangte das „Rasse und Siedlungsamt“ der SS in Berlin, dass „Zigeuner und Zigeunermischlinge“ in der Regel unfruchtbar gemacht werden. Die „Nürnberger Gesetze“ des Jahre 1935 stellten Sinti und Roma in der gesetzlichen Verfolgung mit den Juden gleich. Und bereits am 3. Januar 1936

verfügte der Minister des Innern, Frick, in einer vertraulichen Mitteilung an alle Landesregierung, Standesämter, Aufsichtsbehörden und Gesundheitsämter die Anwendung des Blutschutzgesetzes an und bemerkte: „Zu den artfremden Rassen gehören alle anderen Rassen, das sind in Europa außer den Juden regelmäßig nur die Zigeuner“ (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung 18).

Once they came to power, National Socialists used the already existing anti-Semitic notions to promote their policies. However, in the case of Gypsies, Hitler and his followers faced a difficulty:

The Roma presented a problem for Hitler. The racist policies he directed against the Jews were based on the fact that they were non-Aryans. The Roma were one of the oldest Aryan groups in Europe and did not fit into this category. At first, the Hitler regime tried to force German scholars to deny the truth, and to state that Roma were not Aryans. However, many scholars refused to follow Hitler's demands, often resulting in their own imprisonment. The Nazis soon abandoned the non-Aryan argument, and they created other reasons for doing away with the Roma. According to Nazi policy the Roma were not Nordic. They were "asocial," "subhuman beings" and members of a "lower race" (Tanner 1997).

And, as such, Hitler felt an urgency to control their movement, and limit their numbers:

As a means of creating a pure "Aryan" race, in July of 1933, Hitler's cabinet passed a law against the propagation of "lives not worthy of life" called the "Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring." Because the Nazis considered the Roma to be unworthy of life, they were to be sterilized along with



anyone with "genetically determined" illnesses such as schizophrenia, manic-depressive illness, and deafness (Miller 1998).

The political situation in Yugoslavia became tense toward the early 1930s. Paul, the prince regent, fought to maintain the civil stability as factions of the country grew rebellious and Croatian intellectuals looked at the example of Germany and Austria, desiring to be separated from Serbia and Montenegro. The unrest, insecurity of the regions, and Paul's difficulty in ruling over the country did not leave any time to openly condemn the policies implemented by Germany. Luckily, these policies had no effect upon Gypsies living in Yugoslavia:

Prince Paul, the regent for the new monarch, Peter II (ruled from 1934-1945), struggled to keep the country together and to seek some solution to the growing friction between the Croats, who wanted greater autonomy, and the Serb-dominated government...Gypsy life in Yugoslavia during this unsettling period was vibrant, while Roma intellectuals struggled to define the unique, positive characteristics of Gypsy ethnic identity...Rebecca West noted in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* at least one positive Serbian view of the Rom: "In the eastern parts of Yugoslavia, in Serbia and in Macedonia, the Gypsies are proud of being Gypsies, and other people, which is to say the peasants, for there are practically none other, honor them for their qualities, for their power of making beautiful music and dancing, which the peasants lack, and envy them for being exempt from the necessities of toil and order which lie so heavily on the peasants." Her Serbian companion, a Yugoslav official, went on to explain that while the Austrians and the Germans "despised the Gypsies" because of their poverty, lack

of hygiene, and questionable musical talents, the “Serbs are not bourgeois, so none of these reasons make us hate the Gypsies” (Crowe 218).

However, even though the new policies were of little concern to the Gypsies in Yugoslavia, the silence against them only encouraged further policy establishments, and slowly Europe began to sink into racial hatred against the non-Christian, non-White population. In his eagerness to find a solution to the “unsafe” Gypsies, Hitler continued to launch more rigorous offensives against Jews and Gypsies. One such offensive was the creation of the Research Institute for Racial Hygiene and Population Biology:

Die Nationalsozialisten standen allerdings... zunächst einmal vor dem Problem der „Rassendiagnose“. Deshalb wurde im November 1936 im Reichsgesundheitsamt in Berlin das „Rassenhygieneinstitut“ unter der Leitung des Tübinger Kinder- und Nervenarztes Dr. Robert Ritter eingerichtet (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung 18).

It was hoped that this institute would solve the pressing question of classifying Gypsies:

A recurring problem that arose in connection with the enforcement of various laws and decrees directed against the Gypsies was determining who counted as a Gypsy. This issue became especially acute after the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws, which used racial criteria. Membership in the racial category “Jew” was based on the religious affiliation of parents and grandparents. However, no such simple criterion applied to Gypsies who were Christians and in many cases had intermarried with the local population. Some had become sedentary and were not easily identifiable as Gypsies. In order to solve this problem, the Ministry of the Interior in the spring of 1936 ordered the establishment of a research Institute in

the Reich Health Office. The central task of this institute, located in Berlin and called *Rassenhygienische und bevölkerungsbiologische Forschungsstelle*, was to collect information about Germany's non sedentary population, especially Gypsies and Zigeunermischlinge (mixed parents). These data were to be used by the Kripo and other official agencies in addressing the "Gypsy problem." In addition, the information collected was to be used in formulating a law dealing with the Gypsy issue, which had been under discussion since early 1936 (Lewy 43).

In order to learn more about the Gypsies, the teams from "the Institute toured cities and countryside, educational institutions and Gypsy camps, prisons and concentration camps" collecting various data (*see Fig.8 and 9*), such as eye color, shape and size of head, height, physical complexion (Lewy 45). As the studies were conducted, Robert Ritter, the team's leader proposed certain measures to the Reich Office in how to combat the Gypsy issues, by suggesting extensive sterilization as a means of stopping their increase:

In a study published in 1937, Gypsy specialist Robert Ritter describes a type of children who were able to display "a certain independence and cunning and especially were quick talkers." This kind of disorder, *he characterized* most appropriately as disguised mental retardation." Needless to say, such an approach allowed mental retardation to be established in almost any kind of case. The categories of moral and disguised mental retardation became an instrument to sterilize "asocial" individuals about whom no proof of a genuine mental deficit was available (Lewy 40, 41, *italics added*).

During the research, Eva Justin, one of Ritter's assistants, concluded Ritter's observations by saying that "Gypsies could not be integrated because they were racially inferior." She ended her statement calling for a general rule of sterilization of all Gypsies (Sonneman 195).



**Figure 8: Eva Justin, an assistant in the Research Institute for Racial Hygiene and Population Biology, measuring the head of a Gypsy woman, around 1938, and also checking eye color for racial classification, also around late 1938 (courtesy of Bundesarchiv Koblenz, picture extracted from Guenther Lewy 46, and second picture courtesy of Roma Center for Public Policies).**

Sterilization was used since the 1920s under the "Forderung des 'Rasse-und Siedlungsamtes' der SS in Berlin," which called for sterilization of Gypsies. These sterilizations, however, were 'voluntary':

Criteria for classification as a Rom were twice as strict as those applied to Jews. If two of a person's eight great-grandparents were even part-Rom, that person "had too much *Gypsy blood* to be allowed to live." According to the Nazi hierarchical system, Roma belonged with Jews at the bottom of the racial scale... To the Nazis, being a Rom meant being diseased, so these prisoners were sterilized to

prevent them from spreading this disease by reproduction. Some Roma were sterilized as early as 1933, though no Jews had yet been (Tanner 1997).

After 1933, the sterilizations became compulsory, frequent, and “forced upon Gypsies as a choice instead of deportation to a concentration camp” (Romani Rose 89, *my translation*):

Sterilization of ‘inferior’ people was one of the first measures Nazis proposed in order to improve selective breeding. Precedent for such ‘negative selection’ had been applied in the United States in 1899, when a prison doctor developed the vasectomy and used the procedure on prisoners. Nazis proposed sterilization as early as the 1920’s but it was not until Hitler took power that a compulsory sterilization law was issued, in July 1933. The law ordered sterilization of all those suffering from a hereditary illnesses, and such dubious characteristics as ‘feeble-mindedness’ and chronic alcoholism were attributed to heredity...Sterilization was still being proposed as a way to stop procreation of inferior races, notably, Jews and Gypsies. It was only a short step from the sterilization of those with ‘hereditary illnesses’ to the sterilization of Gypsies. Although sterilization for racial reasons was illegal, it was simple enough to classify the victims as ‘feeble-minded,’ a category defined more by social criteria than by medical formulations, and it was also useful to classify people as criminal. So, in 1939, when Dr. Johannes Behrendt of the Office of Racial Hygiene wrote an article entitled “the Truth about the Gypsies,” reporting that Gypsies were ‘criminal and asocial and ... impossible to educate,’ he claimed that they “should therefore be treated as hereditary sick.” This logic led quite naturally

to his conclusion: “The aim should therefore be *elimination without hesitation* of this characteristically defective element in the population. This should be done by locking them all up and sterilizing them” (Sonneman 193, 194).

Gypsies did not know that the sterilizations were to be conducted alongside with deportation to concentration camps. The Stadtskomandant in Essling, Landjäger, commented in November 1937 on the legal sterilizations, saying:

The Gypsy is and remains a parasite on the people who supports himself almost exclusively by begging and stealing...The Gypsy can never be educated to become a useful person. For this reason it is necessary that the Gypsy tribe be exterminated [ausgerottet] by way of sterilization or castration. With the help of such a law the Gypsy plague would soon be eliminated. I am firmly convinced that an appreciable number of these fellows would immediately cross the border in full flight; the number of the remaining Gypsies would decrease from year to year and they would become superannuated. Such a measure would not cost the state very much money, and within a short span of time the Gypsy plague would be eliminated (Lewy 50).

As if to fulfill Landjäger’s words, the rope around the Gypsies necks was tightened:

In September 1935, Roma became subject to the restrictions of the Nuremberg Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, which forbade intermarriage between Germans and "non-Aryans," specifically Jews, Roma, and people of African descent. In 1937, the National Citizenship Law relegated Roma and Jews to the status of second-class citizens, depriving them of their civil rights. Also in 1937, Heinrich Himmler issued a decree entitled "The Struggle Against the Gypsy

Plague," which reiterated that Roma of mixed blood were the most likely to engage in criminal activity, and which required that all information on Roma be sent from the regional police departments to the Reich Central Office. Between June 12th and June 18th 1938, *Gypsy Clean-Up Week* took place throughout Germany, which, like Kristallnacht for the Jewish people that same year, marked the beginning of the end. Also in 1938, the first reference to "The Final Solution of the Gypsy Question" appeared, in a document signed by Himmler on December 8th that year (Hancock 1997).

It seemed as if sterilization would not be enough to appease National Socialists. In August, 1938 Himmler's Rassenforscher, Dr. Adolf Würth, issued a statement regarding the "Zigeunerfrage" as a "in erster Linie eine Rassenfrage." He also suggested, "That just as the state was dealing with the question of the Jews, it will also deal with the question of the Gypsies" (Romani Rose 89, *my translation*).



**Figure 9: Research conducted on Roma, to identify why they were a subhuman even though they counted as "Aryan," involved taking multiple measurements, data, pictures and making wax castes of Roma faces for better research (courtesy of the Roma Center for Public Policies).**

Soon after his statement in March 1939, further measures were taken:

Im „Altreich“ werden Verordnungen zur besonderen Kennzeichnung der Sinti und Roma erlassen und besondere „Rassenausweise“ ausgegeben. Später werden auch in den besetzten Gebieten entsprechende Vorschriften für Sinti und Roma erlassen: Ihre Ausweise werden mit einem „Z“ versehen; vielerorts müssen sie wie die Juden besondere Armbinden tragen (Romani Rose 90).

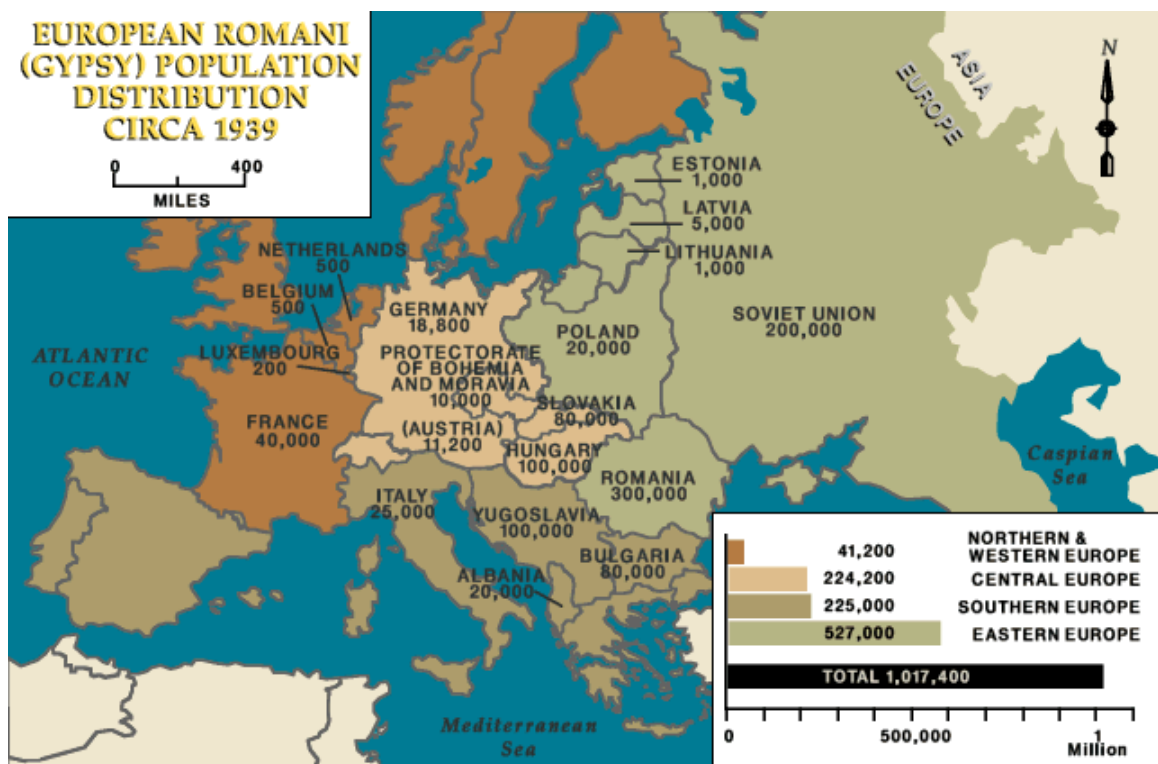


Figure 10: Map detailing Gypsy population distribution throughout Europe prior to the outbreak of World War II. These numbers are estimates, since in many countries Roma and Sinti did not declare themselves as such (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

By the outbreak of World War II, just as in the case of Jews, laws were not in favor of Gypsies:

It comes as no surprise that the Roma, in addition to the Jews, came under the restrictions of the Nuremberg Law for the Protection of Blood and Honor, which forbade the intermarriage or sexual relationships between Aryan and non-Aryan



peoples. A more strict definition of "Gypsy" came about in 1938. A person could be judged as having too much "Gypsy blood" to be allowed to live if two of the individual's eight great-grandparents were even part Gypsy (Miller 1998).

The Final Solution had not yet been finalized in writing; however, its beginnings were there on paper and in oral communications. Still, Gypsies could not dream of the final outcome, nor did they dare imagine anything worse than the legal hunts, discrimination, and persecution they had experienced since entering Europe:

Die Absicht der Nazis zur endgültigen „Lösung der Zigeunerfrage“, so immer wieder ihre Sprache, stand von Anfang an und lange vor Kriegsbeginn fest. Es ging nur noch um den pseudowissenschaftlichen Vorwand, um die organisatorischen Voraussetzungen und die Detailmaßnahmen zur Durchführung des Völkermordes. Die in den Hetzkampagnen der NS-Presse verbreiteten Verleumdungen wurden von Nazi-Wissenschaftlern zu „rassenbiologischen Erkenntnissen“ hochgestapelt. Im Grunde aber betrieb das Berliner „Institut für Rassenhygiene“ nichts anderes als eine systematische Ausgrenzung und Erfassung, auf deren Grundlage die Nazis 500.000 Sinti und Roma bestialisch ermordeten. Die so genannten „Rassengutachten“, (d.h. die gutachterlichen Äußerungen der Rassenhygienischen Forschungsstelle), unterzeichnet von Ritter, Justin, Erhardt, Würth und anderen, waren die Todesurteile, die den Ausschlag für die Deportation in die Konzentrationslager gaben (Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung 19).

Deportations of Gypsies began at the same time as the deportations of Jews. In Germany they were first interned in police stations, while those who found themselves in the invaded states, i.e. Baltic States, Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Hungary and the rest of Nazi-occupied Europe, were forced into camps for later extermination, or if they resisted too much, they were shot on the spot in villages and forests (Tanner 1997). Since October 17, 1939, "allen Sinti und Roma wurde unter Androhung von KZ-Haft verboten, ihre Heimatorte zu verlassen, so that regular collections to *Sammellager* could take place. With each transport of Jews to concentration camps, the SS also requested three to four wagons of Gypsies, in order to effectively deal with the "unworthy sub-humans" (Romani Rose 91, *my translation*). The Final Solution of the Jewish question soon became two-fold since there was the question not only of the Jews, but also of the Gypsies:

Heydrich, who had been entrusted with the "final solution of the Jewish question" on 31 July 1941, shortly after the German invasion of the USSR, also included the Gypsies in his "final solution." The senior SS officer and Chief of Police for the East, Dr. Landgraf, in Riga, informed Rosenberg's Reich Commissioner for the East, Lohse, of the inclusion of the Gypsies in the "final solution." Thereupon, Lohse gave the order, on 24 December 1941, that the Gypsies "should be given the same treatment as the Jews." At about the same time, Adolf Eichmann made the recommendation that the "Gypsy Question" be solved simultaneously with the "Jewish Question." Himmler signed the order dispatching Germany's Sinti and Roma to Auschwitz on 16 December 1942. The "Final Solution" of the "Gypsy Question" had begun at virtually the same moment it can be said to have really

gotten underway for the Jews. Indeed, Gypsies were automatically subject to whatever policies applied to Jews during the entire period of the Final Solution, pursuant to a directive issued by Himmler on 24 December 1941 (i.e., four months prior to the Wannsee Conference which set the full-fledged extermination program in motion). Hence, the fate of Gypsies was not to be distinguished from the fate of the Jews (Churchill 1997).



**Figure 11: Once deportations began, Gypsies were rounded up in two “bundles”: from cities and from forests. If they led a nomadic lifestyle, often they were abused, maltreated, and forced to dig their own grave. Under some special killing units women were also raped and then all were shot and left there. No name, no number, no witnesses (courtesy of the Roma Center for Public Policies).**

Thus, Jews and Gypsies became a racial threat to the pure “Aryan race,” and as such needed to be disposed of.



Figure 12: Map detailing concentration camps with large population of Roma and Sinti (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

Some of the round-ups proceeded in the same manner as the round up of the Jews. One of the transit camps was provided as a “rest station” before the prisoners were shipped off to an extermination camp. The conditions of life were equally difficult, and often Gypsies were forced under harsh circumstances to dig graves, work in factories, or in workshops:

Even before the outbreak of the war, the Nazis had attempted to register the Gypsies and limit their freedom to move from place to place. Some were placed in concentration camps under the pretext of campaigns against antisocial elements. After the invasion of Poland, it was decided to resettle the Gypsies from the Reich to the General Government. After their removal from Germany they

were settled in Jewish ghettos and camps for Jews... There are no surviving written instructions or orders on the aim of placing Gypsies in the camp or the way they were to be treated... Nevertheless, it was common knowledge that the will of the almighty Reichführer was to ‘make all Gypsies disappear from the face of the earth (Dlugoborski 52, 54, 55).

CITIZENSHIP OF 20,943 GYPSIES REGISTERED IN THE MAIN BOOK OF THE GYPSY CAMP



Source: *Memorial Book: The Gypsies at Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Munich-London-New York-Paris, 1993). The map does not include approximately 1,700 Polish Gypsies from the Bialystok region who were killed without being registered, several hundred Gypsies registered outside the Gypsy “family camp” in Birkenau, or several hundred Gypsies for whom the entries in the family camp record book are illegible.

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Graphic design © by Paweł Warchol

**Figure 13: Auschwitz Memorial Book-The Gypsies at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Munich-London-New York-Paris, 1993).** This map does not include approximately 1,700 Polish Gypsies from the Bialystok region who were killed without being registered, several hundred Gypsies registered outside the Gypsy “family camp” in Birkenau, or several hundred Gypsies for whom the entries in the family camp record book are illegible, but it gives the number of Gypsy transports on the European soil to Auschwitz: Yugoslavia 125, Hungary 34, Slovakia 1, Germany 13 108, Poland 1273 etc. For further detailed statistics refer to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum publications (*courtesy of Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Dlugoborski Vol.III, 53*).

Once they arrived in the extermination camps, Gypsies seemed to have gained a reputation of the worst kind, and special sections were built under the title “Zigeunerlager” to “accommodate” them. For some time these camps proved to be a blessing, since families were allowed to stay together. More often, however, they were camps used for experiments, and Gypsies were submitted to medical tests:

The program of extermination carried out by the Third Reich extended not only to Jews and to Slavic nations, but also to the Gypsies. Himmler believed that they ‘should be eliminated from Europe as a race of little value.’ In December 1942, he issued an order that all Gypsies (with the exception of the Sinti and Lalleri branches) found in the territory of the Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were to be arrested without regard to age or sex and confined in concentration camps, where they were to ‘remain’ until the end of the war (Dlugoborski 235).

When Josef Mengele arrived at Auschwitz, he was named head physician in the “Gypsy camp.” That is where he began his research. His special interest fell on the study of twins. To further his research, Mengele spread diseases, such as “water cancer” (gangrene of the cheek, or noma faciei), which was unknown elsewhere in Auschwitz, and which slowly began spreading in the Gypsy camp (Dlugoborski 261).

Next to the experiments conducted on them, Gypsies still endured forced sterilizations. Often new methods of experimental sterilization were performed, in order to find the cheapest ways of preventing further increase of undesirables:

“We do not know exactly how many Gypsies were sterilized,” noted historian Henry Friedlander, “but we do know that the numbers were large enough to

support the conclusion that sterilization of Gypsies was a calculated policy.” In 1938, drawing on the recommendations of Dr. Ritter, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler had ordered that all Gypsies over the age of twelve were to be sterilized. The policy was carried out not only on prisoners but also on those exempted from the concentration camps. Himmler’s order to send the Gypsies to Auschwitz in 1943 had excluded those still serving in the military or the soldiers who had been wounded or released with decorations. The application of this order was erratic, however, many servicemen, [...], showed up in Auschwitz, some even wearing uniforms with war decorations. Shortly before the liquidation of the Gypsy camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, officials announced that veterans who volunteered to be sterilized would then be freed. The offer was false, of course; they were not freed after sterilization (Sonneman 198).

The fates, which befell Gypsies in other European states under Nazi rule, did not reach those who lived on the territory of Yugoslavia at the outbreak of the war. Once, however, Germany and its allies absorbed Yugoslavia, the future seemed bleaker for many of the Gypsies in Croatia:

The richness and diversity of Roma life in the regions of Yugoslavia with the greatest Gypsy concentrations-Serbia and Macedonia would be severely damaged by the excesses of World War II. Prior to Yugoslavia’s invasion by the Axis Powers in 1941, Prince Paul tried to maneuver his country through the complex, dangerous waters of the times in an attempt to preserve his country’s neutrality. Although he was initially sympathetic to the Allied side, he finally succumbed to German pressure to join the Tripartite Pact alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan.

As Yugoslav diplomats signed the accord in Berlin on March 26, 1941, a coup took place in Belgrade that removed Prince Paul as regent. Ten days later, a German-led coalition of Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania invaded Yugoslavia... What invaders did not absorb was transformed into puppet Croatian and Serbian states... Approximately 28,500 Roma were trapped in the NDH (Independent Croatian State or Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska) in 1941, which included most of Bosnia-Herzegovina, while many Gypsies who had earlier fled to Italian territory were put in detention camps in Sardinia or Puglia. Those who entered Italy after the creation of NDH in 1941 were watched to try to keep them from reentering Croatia to help relatives. The Italians, who had no tolerance for the genocidal policies of their allies, also gave some Rom "Italian identity cards to put them further beyond the reach of the Nazis and the Ustasha until 1943," while those who were "caught in the German dragnet... were sent to camps in Austria for extermination" (Crowe 218,219).

The two regions, Serbia and Croatia reacted differently to the invasion. While one resisted the rule of the puppet regime and protected its various ethnicities, the other seemed to embrace this newfound freedom and to inhale the Aryan ideology, which brought many ethnicities on its soil heartache, grief, and eventually a tormented death.



## **Chapter 2:**

### **Yugoslavia: the case of Croatia and Serbia**

As National Socialists gained power and influence in Germany, their propaganda and teachings found support from political factions all over Europe. Thus, it is not surprising that the National Socialist's ideas also gained support in a few of Yugoslavia's political factions. They presented to these factions a possible solution to the on-going political and social struggles. The possible relationship with Germany, the teachings of a "super race," and a desire for new leadership was greatly welcomed in some intellectual circles in Croatia and Serbia. As a multiethnic country with various religions and political aspirations, Yugoslavia was in a transition state. Prince regent Paul "labored hard to achieve internal stability" and keep everyone satisfied (Cohen 21). The political factions with national socialist sentiments became his greatest struggle:

The Yugoslav Action movement (active in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia) was formed in Belgrade in 1930 and, within three years, was calling for a totalitarian state. Soon, the Yugoslav Action adopted symbols imitative of the Nazis. Appropriating a blue swastika as their symbol and the raising of the right hand as their salute, they attracted considerable interest in Berlin. In 1934, Viktor von Heeren, the German envoy in Belgrade, reported to his Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the Yugoslav Action "shows a kinship with National Socialism, even in its external characteristics" (Cohen 12).

Besides the struggles within the country, Paul was experiencing persistent pressure from Italy. The immediate neighboring country wished to incorporate Yugoslavia as their ally and use the national socialistic and fascist sentiments within the

country to further Italy's advancement on the continent. Paul feared Italy's ulterior motives to be the annexation of the Croatian and Slovenian coast, and resisted reaching any agreement while at the same time remaining in communication to prevent the outrage of the factions within his country that supported Italian Fascism and German National Socialism. Despite all the inner turmoil and pressure, Yugoslavia's political neutrality held until early 1941. As Germany kept on advancing all around the Balkan state, it became evident that Yugoslavia needed to be incorporated, since Yugoslavia was a bridge to Africa and the Middle East. Hitler lived in belief that this country too would join the Axis, and continued pushing Paul to reach a final decision and tie Yugoslavia to Germany. For this reason the Führer met with the prince regent multiple times in the mid and late 1930s:

Hitler's demands and offers were reported to be Yugoslavia's adherence to the Axis, the prohibition of all anti-Axis agitation in Yugoslavia (which of course amounted to a suppression of democratic freedom), the opening up of Yugoslavia's railroads for the transport of German war materials, a guarantee of the inviolability of Yugoslav territory and finally the promise of territorial expansion at the expense of Greece. Some of the ministers resigned in protest against any agreement with Germany, which would definitely bind Yugoslavia to the Axis and the so-called "New World Order." The negotiations lasted for the whole month of March, with conflicting reports as to the strength of the two opposed factions in Yugoslavia. Finally yielding to a German Ultimatum, the Yugoslav government on March 22<sup>nd</sup> decided to sign, and on March 25<sup>th</sup> the

Yugoslav prime minister and foreign minister affixed their signatures in Vienna to the Axis pact (Encyclopedia Britannica 1943, 23:923).

Surrounded by Axis Powers on all sides, the Yugoslavian government saw no other solution but to join the Axis pact:

At the beginning of the 40's, Yugoslavia found itself surrounded by hostile countries. Except for Greece, all other neighboring countries had signed agreements with either Germany or Italy. Hitler was strongly pressuring Yugoslavia to join the Axis powers. The government was even prepared to reach a compromise with him, but the spirit in the country was completely different. Public demonstrations against Nazism prompted a brutal reaction (www.serbia-info 2004).

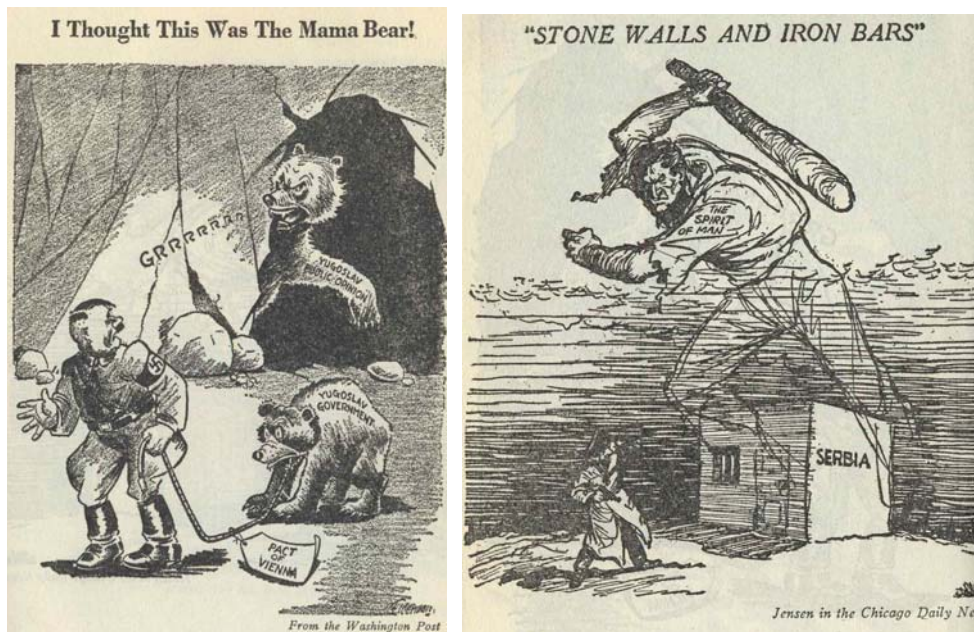


Figure 1: Cartoons from Washington Post and Chicago Daily News, commenting the response of the Yugoslavian public to Nazi-Yugoslav Pact in 1941 (courtesy of Louise Adamic 385, 386).

While the signing took place in Vienna, and Yugoslavia officially joined the German lines, public opinion in the country, especially in the territory of Serbia and Montenegro, followed by some support in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Croatia, strongly demonstrated the Yugoslav rejection of Hitler:

On the surface it seemed unrealistic to expect a small country with an obsolete army to refuse the pact and invite the Nazi *Luftwaffe* and panzer divisions to do their worst...The announcement that the Belgrade regime had signed the pact was followed by a depressing lull in news. Hitler was having it his way after all. German troops would go through Yugoslavia to invade Greece...Then came the climax of March 27<sup>th</sup>. Two days prior to the climax, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, children in different parts of the country started to pound their school desks, to shout and chalk on blackboards and walls insulting remarks about the Belgrade regime and Hitler. Grimfaced peasants poured into the capital. Some had guns under their cloaks. They were summoned by no manifesto, no organized call. They followed an instinctive revolutionary urge. The humiliation that Hitler and their own government were trying to impose on them was more than they could bear. City folk mingled with them...Small crowds moved about or stood in the streets, quietly. No speeches. People hummed old Serbian songs, at once sad and joyful, full of meaning beyond translation, but saying in effect that sometimes your country comes to such a pass that it is your lot to die in the interest of life (Adamic 369).



**Figure 2: The new government, with Dusan Simovic (third to the left) young Prince Peter II, and his uncle, Prince regent Paul, who conducted the political affairs until the coup of March 27 (courtesy of Yugoslavian National Archives, arhiv.sv.gov.yu).**

After two days of protests, demonstrations and revolts in the capital, “on March 27<sup>th</sup> in the early morning hours, the people and parts of the army...overthrew the government, under the leadership of the chief of Yugoslav aviation, Gen. Dusan Simovic, who became Prime Minister” (Encyclopedia Britannica 1943, 23:923). Prince Peter II was installed as the ruling king, being only seventeen at the time. This new government, principally under the leadership of the Prime Minister Simovic, declined to ratify Yugoslav’s signature, claiming they would “rather go to war than sign the pact, better go to the grave than to be Germany’s slave.” In the heat of the climax, most Croatian and some Serbian politicians and factions did not for a moment forget the agendas they promoted, and though the public chanted and rejoiced, these factions wished to support Germany. Besides the fear of German aggression and a possible attack through the Croatian lowlands, Croatia also saw in this dissonance of opinions a way to detach itself

from Serbia's governing imperative. The country now faced enemies within the country, as well as without:

The heroic move on the part of the Serbs had come in a certain way too late. They had decided to make a last stand for their liberties rather than submit to the Axis, but they did it at time when they were practically surrounded on all sides by German troops, which had by then occupied Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, as well as Austria, so that the Yugoslav army had to defend almost all the long frontier (Encyclopedia Britannica 1943, 23:923).

Hitler was furious at the act of the Yugoslavian people, and used this as one of many excuses to postpone his invasion of Russia and to invade Yugoslavia, the Russian ally. "On March 27<sup>th</sup>, Hitler declared that he was determined to 'destroy Yugoslavia as a military power and a sovereign state,' and ordered the Wehrmacht staff to complete military preparation at the greatest possible speed" (Encyclopedia Americana 1993, 29:442). Despite the long military history and brave individuals, "Yugoslavia and its army were unprepared" and not sufficiently equipped to stand the blow of Germany, who was quick to promise chunks of land to Bulgaria, Hungary, and Albania if they joined in the offensive (Adamic 361). The invasion and devastation of the country began from the air, when "in the early morning of April 6, German planes bombed Belgrade. They came in at rooftop level, and in an hour and a half killed more than 17,000 of the city's inhabitants" (Encyclopedia Americana 1993, 29:443).

The air raid was followed by an attack on the ground, which advanced from various directions in a synchronized manner:

On April 10, 1941, the German army struck from several directions, especially from Bulgaria, and was supported in its efforts by the Italian army, and even by the Hungarian army (in spite the treaty of everlasting peace and friendship which had been concluded only a few weeks before) and the Bulgarian army. Against the immense superiority in men and materials, the Yugoslav army, in spite of courageous resistance, succumbed within two weeks (Encyclopedia Britannica 1943, 23:923).



**Figure 8: Bombing and invasion of Belgrade began on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and lasted two weeks (courtesy of serbia-info.com, World War II and its effects).**



**Figure 9: Cartoons from Washington Post and the Wilmington News, commenting Germany's advances on European soil in 1941 (courtesy of Louis Adamic 388, 383).**

On the Croatian front, “the Croat troops in the Yugoslav Fourth and Seventh armies, stationed on the northern frontier, mutinied, and by nightfall both armies had been dissolved. On the afternoon of April 10 the Second [German] Army troops entered Zagreb,” where the Croat government welcomed and praised them as liberators (Encyclopedia Americana 1993, 29:443). The “invasion of Yugoslavia by Nazi Germany was an occasion for separatist Croatian forces to establish an Independent State of Croatia under the protection of Hitler and Mussolini” (Dedijer 11). The Independent State of Croatia was created to reflect the Third Reich with Ante Pavelic, a fascist ally, as the leader, the “father of a nation.”



Figure 10: The invasion of Yugoslavia by Germany and German Allies, Hungary and Bulgaria, in April 1941 (courtesy of National Archives and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

The establishment of the Independent State of Croatia initiated further division of the Yugoslavian territory amongst Germany and its allies, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Italy:

The victors carved up the country. Germany and Italy divided Slovenia between them. Italy took part of Dalmatia on its own behalf and the Kosovo district and western Macedonia on behalf of Albania and set up a protectorate over



Montenegro. Bulgaria annexed most of Macedonia; Hungary annexed the western half of Vojvodina (Backa) and some small districts on the Croatian border. Patrons presented Pavelic (Croatian NDH leader) with the control of an Independent State of Croatia; this included all Bosnia but not all Dalmatia and was nominally a kingdom, with Aimone, duke of Spoleto, second son of the duke of Aosta, as its absentee sovereign. The rump of Serbia was placed under German military occupation and was allowed from August 1941 to have a puppet government of its own under Gen. Milan Nedic. The eastern half of Vojvodina (Banat) had a separate German military administration, in which members of the local German minority played the chief part (Encyclopedia Britannica 1971, 23:922).



Figure 11: The partition of Yugoslavia in 1941 between Germany and the Allies Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, and Croatia (courtesy of National Archives and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

The revolt and freedom were short-lived, Germany and its allies took control of the country, and “the gallant little country that dared to defy Hitler was pitilessly smashed” (Levin 510). Yugoslavia collapsed as an organized state on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1941 and the two regions Serbia and Croatia were left as puppet regimes:

Germans and Italians soon established puppet states in both Serbia and Croatia. In Serbia, the Germans launched Operation Punishment, which razed Belgrade to the ground and resulted in 17,000 civilian deaths. Soon after the Yugoslav government fled, General Milan Nedic, Yugoslav’s former minister of war, formed a ‘Government of National Salvation.’ In Croatia, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was formed under Ante Pavelic, the leader of an Italian-trained insurgency group, the Ustasha. While Serbs generally remained loyal to King Aleksandar and the Yugoslav government in exile, many Croats saw NDH as their liberation from over two decades of Serbian control. This initial support soon dampened, as Croatia was forced to cede most of Dalmatia to Italy, and northern Slovenia to Germany under the Treaty of Rome. While Bosnia-Herzegovina was joined to the NDH in compensation, many nationalists felt betrayed by the reduction in their territory. As well, many Ustasha officers and soldiers were poorly trained, and Pavelic’s distinct lack of charisma and inability to hold mass rallies reduced his exposure among the population. Nevertheless, the lack of credible resistance was also noticeable. Both Croatian Peasants Party and the Catholic Church remained largely passive...In Serbia, the Nedic regime enjoyed some support (MacDonald 134).

To ensure his victory over Yugoslavia, and debilitate people from further attempts of uprisings against the German and Italian forces, “Hitler instructed Himmler to ‘put a river of blood’ between the Serbian and Croatian people. The idea was not only to kill off *anyone found in Serbia proper*, but to induce those remaining and the Croatians to hate and fear one another, making impossible any kind of concerted action by them” (Adamic 36, *italics added*).

This “river of blood” is noticed through records and documentation that survived World War II. The Croatian Peasant Party, Partisans and Chetniks fought their Axis enemies, as an intruder into their politics and their homeland, and at the same time these same factions distrusted each other. The distrust incapacitated them to join forces and defend their country. In fact, their leading style and ideology were so contrasting that while fighting Germany they fought each other in an attempt to gain power. The battle between two fronts for political power and leadership in Yugoslavia prevented any possible collective effort and caused confusion among the people within the borders of Yugoslavia and also among the Allies. The civil conflict brought additional suffering, atrocities and unnecessary deaths:

The wartime records of some groups of Serbs and Croats were dubious, which allowed historians to cast doubt on the conduct of each nation during the Second World War. Some had collaborated with the occupiers, some had committed massacres of civilian populations...Nevertheless, there were clear qualitative differences between the Allied-backed Chetnik monarchists and their small-scale massacres, and the Nazi-backed Ustasha with their Croatian-run concentration camps” (MacDonald 135).

In this whirlwind of confusion, Jews and Gypsies alike could hope for little. It was almost impossible to know who was a friend and who a foe. The Gypsies' great hope for survival lay in their ability to adapt to yet another form of centuries-long persecution and in the continuation of their nomadic life style by constantly fleeing the enemy. Those who remained in the territory of NDH were lucky enough to have been rounded up by Italian forces, which provided them with protection and saved their lives. Most, however, were rounded up by Croatian forces and sent to concentration camps. The case of Serbia was a bit more complicated than that, since the region was carved up by Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria, with a puppet set up in Serbia proper, under the jurisdiction of the Germans. Each of the occupied forces had different policies, and each conducted their racial agendas in very different ways.

### **Life and death in Serbia:**

Serbia ceased to exist as a republic in the Yugoslavian kingdom “through the authorization of Premier Dusan Simovic, *who* without knowledge of the rest of the government, signed a capitulation agreement with the German command in behalf of Yugoslavia” (Adamic 33). Hitler set up a puppet regime to ensure his governing power in Serbia proper and to prevent any further outbreaks of rebellion:

For his quisling in Serbia proper Hitler picked General Milan Nedic of the Yugoslav Army. An extremely able man and also a tough hombre, a pro-Nazi since 1937, when he became convinced that German power was destined to dominate the world, Nedic had no rivals for this position (Adamic 33).



*Serbian president Milan Nedić on a state visit to Adolf Hitler, September 18, 1943. This photo first appeared in the November, 1943, Spanish edition of Signal.*

**Figure 12: Picture taken during a meeting between Adolf Hitler and Milan Nedić, the president of Serbian Puppet Regime, in 1943 (courtesy of Philip Cohen, preface).**

Nedić's regime, the Government of National Salvation, was a puppet regime with very limited control. Soon after the establishment, the puppet regime had to apply the racial policies of the Third Reich:

Soon after the start of the occupation, on May 31, the military commander announced a regulation that imposed various restrictions on both Gypsies and Jews. Some of these provisions, for example the dismissal of lawyers, doctors, dentists and pharmacists as well as all public office holders, probably did not affect many Gypsies; several other rules did. Gypsies had to wear a yellow armband with the imprint "Gypsy"; members of both sexes between the ages fourteen and sixty were made subject to compulsory labor; all Gypsies were barred from theaters, cinemas, swimming pools, restaurants and public markets; they were subject to a curfew between 8pm and 6am, and they were not to leave

their place of residence without permission of the district military command. Anyone descended from at least three Gypsy grandparents was considered a Gypsy; Zigeunermischlinge (those with one or two Gypsy grandparents or married to a Gypsy) were to be treated like Gypsies (Lewy 129).



Figure 13: Map of Serbian territory in 1943, occupied by Germany, not including Vojvodina, which was under Hungarian occupation. Prior to 1943 Bulgaria held parts of the lower Serbia (Kosovo) and Macedonia (courtesy of National Archives).

These policies included frequent round ups and ghetto establishments, which slowly slipped into deportations to concentration camps in Serbia territory:

Rump Serbia, which had a Gypsy population of no more than 40,000 in the spring of 1941, was under the military control of the German army, aided by the puppet Government of National Salvation. Serbian Roma suffered from similar, though not as deadly, policies as their Croatian counterparts. The Gypsy quarter on the outskirts of Belgrade in Zemun had been bombed, like the rest of the Serbian capital, several days before Germans invaded the city in early April 1941. Once it

had fallen, Nazi authorities required the Roma to wear yellow armbands with “Zigeuner” printed on them. On May 31, 1941, German military authorities decreed, “Gypsies are to be treated as Jews.” Finally all Gypsies were to be put on a special register. On October 23, 1941, authorities decided to open a concentration camp for Jews and Gypsies on the fairgrounds at Zemun and destroyed the Gypsy camp that lay at its edge for health reasons. Later, “jurisdiction of Zemun camp passed to the Croat regime and the Ustasha guarded the camp under German Security Police command.” Over the next year, about 10 percent of Belgrade’s Roma were sent to the Semlin camp, where they became slave laborers, forced to dig graves for Jews killed in mobile gas vans and buried in Avala south of Belgrade (Crowe 220).



**Figure 14: A clean up after the bombing of Belgrade. All Jews and Gypsies were forced to work (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

Hitler hoped that the puppet regime could control the outbreak of further conflict, suppress any guerilla activities, and regulate the ghettos and labor camps. Leaving a handful of German troops to regulate the occupied territory, Hitler went back to his

previous preparations to finalize the delayed attack on the Soviet Union. This action backfired, as a new uprising spread across the region, bringing in question the authority of the puppet regime's leaders and the ability of the German units to control Serbian people:

Many German units were withdrawn from Yugoslavia in preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union, and this weakening of the German presence prompted the Communist-led resistance movement to step up its activities. On July 12, about three weeks after Germany had invaded the Soviet Union, the Serbian resistance issued a call for a general uprising. The German occupation authorities reacted with reprisal executions, and, as the partisan movement grew in strength and aggressiveness, they began a policy of shooting an ever increasing number of hostages, especially Communists, Jews and Gypsies (Lewy 128).



**Figure 15: A street car in Belgrade, 1941, with a sign: Forbidden for Jews. According to a decree on May 31, 1941 all Gypsies were to be treated just like Jews (courtesy of Memorial Jasenovac Museum).**



Outraged at the resistance's perseverance, Hitler enacted the mass executions and all "Roma were...used as hostages as part of the Reich's scheme to kill "Gypsies, Jews and other hostages at a 1:100 ratio for every German soldier killed in Serbia" (Crowe 220). One witness account reports that German soldiers "took all Jews who had not previously been removed from the community, and a band of Gypsies, which came a night before to the community from somewhere, to the mass execution; Germans took all the Gypsy boys and men between fifteen and fifty, and lined them up with the rest" (Adamic 23). National Socialists lined up Gypsies with the rebels from the Partisans and Communists, making it easier to explain their execution as a justified punishment for disobedience. There was neither any proof nor evidence to convict Gypsies of committing any crimes or participating in the uprising:

In the case of Serbia, no evidence was ever adduced that the Jews and Gypsies shot had anything to do with the armed struggle against the German occupation forces. Although some Jews and Gypsies undoubtedly did serve with the Partisans, the mass executions inflicted upon these two groups of people were clearly disproportionate. Jews and Gypsies were singled out on account of deep-seated hostility and therefore subjected to collective punishment in flagrant violation of the laws and customs of war. In the eyes of the German military commanders it was considered axiomatic that Jews were Communists and therefore Germany's enemies; Gypsies were regarded as spies. They therefore had no qualms about imposing draconian reprisal measures on Jews and Gypsies. Lastly, it is highly doubtful that these mass shootings had a deterrent effect upon

the population; they probably only increased the willingness of Serbs to join the Partisans (Lewy 130, 131).

The truth was that these shootings of Jews and Gypsies were yet another method of systematic annihilation. In an attempt to protect innocent Gypsies from the racial policies, and save some within the community, the Serbian government stepped in “in order to eliminate certain harshness” and changed the racial definition of a Gypsy to one “emphasizing social standing. From then on, Gypsies who were Serbian citizens, who could prove that they ‘had been sedentary since 1850, and had a respected occupation and led a regular lifestyle’ were exempted from restrictions,” however, if “they could not obtain this certification, they were made subjects to compulsory labor or were taken to concentration camps” designed for Jews and Gypsies (Lewy 129). Two such camps were established by the middle of September, and it soon became evident that the prisoners from these camps would be used for the shootings. Thus, the truth was disguised under premises of rebellion, security, and safety measures, and as an example to all who attempted to defy German troops in the future. In a letter to a friend dated October 17, 1941, and in a memo dated October 26, 1941, Telford Taylor, a German officer, approved of the shootings as a method of systematic annihilation:

In the last eight days I had 2,000 Jews and Gypsies shot in accordance with the ratio 1:100 for bestially murdered German soldiers, and a further 2,200, likewise mostly Jews, will be shot in the next days. This is not a pretty business. At any rate, it has to be, if only to make clear what it means even to attack a German soldier... The Jewish *and* Gypsy question solves itself most quickly in this way...As a matter of principle it must be said that the Jews and Gypsies in

general represent an element of insecurity and thus a danger to public order and safety. It is the Jewish intellect that has brought on this war and that has to be destroyed. Gypsies, on account of their inner and outer disposition, cannot be useful members of the family of nations. It has been established that the Jewish element plays an important part in the leadership of the bands and that Gypsies in particular are responsible for special atrocities and intelligence. That is why it is a matter of principle in each case to put all Jewish men and all male Gypsies at the disposal of the troops as hostages (Lewy 131, *italics added*).

The shootings of Gypsies and Jews were often allowed in order to protect or save the locals. As in the case of Rabbis in the Jewish ghetto communities, the decision had to be made who would be sent to a certain death, and often the strange and different non-white people and non-Christians ended up being the scapegoats:

On October 26, 1941 Harald Turner, German officer in charge of the German units in the region, issued order number 44/41, specifying that the subjects for retaliations should be primarily Jews and Gypsies...Indeed, in his postwar testimony, SS colonel Wilhelm Fuchs, chief of the Einsatzgruppe for Serbia prior to January, 1942, stated: "I often gave Jews (*or Gypsies*) to be shot in order to save Serbs" (Cohen 115).

These measures only helped promote German policies. In their hope to rid the region of Gypsies, however, National Socialists miscalculated the numbers of Gypsies on the territory of Serbia proper and falsely hoped to have made Serbia "Gypsy free and soon also Jew free":

Though the Germans claimed by 1942 that Serbia was “Gypsy free,” they only effectively controlled about one-third of Serbia’s Roma population. In reality, they woefully overestimated the number of Gypsies and Jews in Serbia and Belgrade. German officials initially calculated that there were 150,000 Gypsies in Serbia in the spring of 1941; on the eve of opening the Semlin camp in early December 1941, they expected “16000 Gypsies and Jews to be interned at the new Judenlager (Jewish camp). Though records vary, it is estimated that only 6,280 Jews and Gypsies were in the camp by March 1942, with Jews making up 90 percent of the inmate population. Many Gypsies have already fled, hid, evaded, or joined the resistance (Crowe 220, 221).

The hostage shootings continued, but soon after these executions began, Gypsies understood that it was their lot to either go to their immediate death or to hide. Only few sat around to await their immediate death and once again became nomads. Such was the case of Slobodan Berberski, a writer and Roma activist, born 1919, who was captured during the round up in Zrenjanin in 1941. He escaped from the prison’s hospital with a group of prisoners, hid in forests until he met up with the First Partisan Regiment, which he joined, and fought with until the liberation of Yugoslavia (Ackovic 13, *my translation*). The Gypsies hiding in Serbia soon proved to not be as easy a prey as the Gypsies in Germany had been, especially since the Partisan ranks under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito welcomed anyone willing to fight and defend their country. Josip Broz, a Croat himself, escaped persecution in royalist Yugoslavia in the early 1930s due to his Communist ideology and activities. In his aspiration to bring equality and camaraderie, he was disappointed at the Communist regime he witnessed in Russia and returned to

Yugoslavia at the outbreak of World War II in hopes of fighting with his people against oppression. After Germany invaded Yugoslavia, he began building up forces in the mountains of lower Serbia. Tito, a nickname he gained for his great leadership and delegation abilities (Ti –to: you-do that), welcomed everyone into the Partisan ranks, not regarding social status, ethnicity, gender, or upbringing. Only one rule applied. All had to treat each other as brothers and sisters. Because of their political aspirations to establish equality among the ethnicities and religions in Yugoslavia, Partisans fought not only Germany and its allies; they were also faced with the enemy within, the Chetniks:

The most prominent Chetnik leader was Dragoljub (Draza) Mihajlovic, a Yugoslav Royal Army colonel...Appointed minister of the army, navy, and air force by the Yugoslav government-in-exile in London in January, 1942, Mihajlovic was a devoted royalist, whose relationship to the Axis powers evolved into a pattern of complexity and compromise...By late 1941, Mihajlovic's Chetniks effectively had abandoned resistance to the Axis in favor of the struggle against Tito's Partisans, and thereafter maintained a pattern of collaboration with both Germans and Italians against Partisans, notwithstanding sporadic acts of anti-Axis sabotage. Indeed, during late 1943 and 1944, and especially after Allied support had shifted to Tito, the Chetniks made a point to openly fight the Axis in the presence of American and British military observers (Cohen 40).



**Figure 16: Wanted dead or alive: Reward of 100.000 Reich marks in gold for the person who turns in Communist leader Tito alive or dead. Josip Broz Tito, leader of Partisan resistance forces and of the Communist Proletariat, Croat by birth, posed a great threat to German military forces in Yugoslavia. He continually disturbed their plans, taking in any escapees, and infiltrating the German posts (courtesy of Photogallery titoville.com).**

Draza Mihajlovic was more concerned with the protection of the royal family status in Yugoslavia than with the enemy from the outside. The guard units that were regarded as prestigious, elite, and noble military units during World War I became a threat to the return of peace during World War II. Because of their prestigious reputation, Chetniks fooled allied forces into sending them aid and supplies. But, even though Chetniks pledged to side with the Allies, the ultimate goal of defying Communists and preserving the monarchy was more important. In their personal war against Communism, Chetniks often shifted sides, helping the Axis powers when it fit their pursuits. This inner turmoil aided Germans in their fight against Partisans. Allied forces supplied Chetniks until 1943 and thus hindered Partisans in their advances against Germany. The Partisan ranks, however, grew each day, with many refugees joining the groups. Among these were Gypsies fleeing the enemy. Gypsies ended up being valuable recruits, especially as message carriers:

... We went to Bulgaria. Same thing happened. Then we slowly ran out of money. It had gotten tight. So we went back to Yugoslavia again because it happened the same thing in Romania, in Bulgaria. So we went to Yugoslavia and there it really got bad. We ran out of money. I had no more shoes to wear; I was barefooted. We couldn't stay in the cities, so we stayed on farms. We slept in barns and we had to live on what we found. People gave us food; we found corn that was in the field, and berries. That's how we survived... They picked me to bring the message there because I could speak Yugoslavian. And I blended in with Yugoslavian kids. And they said to walk on railroad tracks so I don't get lost. Go to the next village and somebody will wait for me there. They said when you get there and you see a light, then you stop there and somebody will come and pick them up and you tell them... and they told me what to tell them (Sonneman 97, 98).

This woman was one of many Gypsy youth sent on dangerous assignments as couriers. When they got caught, Gypsies faced certain death by immediate execution, or were sent to one of the concentration camps in Serbia. She recounts her stay in the concentration camp designed for Gypsies:

There was no Sunday, there was no winter day. In the wintertime, they give you thin clothing, just for the meanness of it. They give you wooden clogs, if they fit or if they didn't fit. You just followed orders. You didn't say you were too weak. You got beaten, you got hurt, you got taken away. You just don't say, "I don't feel good, I'm tired, I don't want to, I'm homesick, I'm still a child." You just followed orders. You made no waves (Sonneman 101).

The nomadic life style, the constant need to continue moving, and the ability to adapt, however, proved to be an advantage to the Gypsies collaborating with Partisans, and very few ended up being caught. This was the case with my family. My great aunt, Katarina Grebenar, remembers as a young girl of the constant movement before troops, of days filled with hunger, frost and light clothes, of hiding in bushes and forests, and of Partisans who fed them:

My mom would wake us up in the middle of the night, and tell us we needed to be quiet and get ready. We knew that meant we needed to pack light, and to take a piece of bread or anything available, because it also meant we did not know when and if we were coming back to this place ever again. We would escape through back doors, climb out of windows, and slip into the darkness of night, into the fields of corn and sunflowers, until we could reach a thick growth of woods. Often we would see torch lights in the places we escaped and a big fire rising from the houses, caravans, and tents... They burnt my village down... We spent nights in the woods, hiding and avoiding main roads, continually moving to a new place in hopes of being safer there. Sometimes people would feed us, and frequently if we bumped into Partisans in the forests, they would take us in. But my mom continued to move, never stopping, always calculating that we would be safer if we were one step faster than the Germans or their friends (*Personal testimony, my translation*).

While life for Gypsies under German occupation became a constant flight, life for Gypsies who lived in Vojvodina, under Hungarian occupation, was much easier. Many received protective status under Hungarian law, were numbered among Hungarian



citizens, and were recruited to fight under the Hungarian flag. My uncle recounts the story of his father, Josip Grebenar:

My father was a Hungarian Rom, and as such got enlisted in the Hungarian army in 1941. He fought on the Hungarian side, until Partisans captured him during the battle at Batina. Partisans were going to shoot him because they could not afford prisoners on their long marches, however, before they decided whether to have the execution, their units were attacked. In order to confuse the enemy, Partisans put all the Hungarian soldiers in the front lines, and commanded them to fight. My father fought and survived. Once he claimed his true identity as a Gypsy, Partisans allowed him to stay. I assume he fought with them till the end of the war, and from then on, always declared himself as a Gypsy (*Personal testimony, my translation*).

Though some Gypsies joined Hungarian ranks, they sought the first possible opportunity to escape, as is evident in the testimony of Mihajlo Buligovic Mladji, named after his father, who spoke about his father's fate:

My father got recruited with the Hungarian army, just like many Roma living in Vojvodina. My father did not want to fight with the Axis powers, and as soon as an opportunity presented itself, he escaped. Not knowing whether to join Chetniks or Partisans, he remained in hiding until the end of the war. He feared being prosecuted as a Hungarian by the Communists, so he openly began declaring himself as a Gypsy. He was granted a pardon and remained living in Vojvodina. He never spoke of the years in hiding, only that he kept close to woods and

forests. He spoke very little of the war or the persecution of Gypsies during the war (*Personal testimony, my translation*).

As greater numbers of Gypsies began joining the resistance, the Partisan leadership realized they needed to provide greater protection to minorities in their ranks. This decision was put in writing at the Second Meeting of the Anti-Fascist Committee of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, which met on 29 November 1943 in Jajce. At this meeting, several important points came out, such as equality among the republics of Yugoslavia, with a guarantee for a future of unity. In that unity, all these regions were called upon to forget their hatred and guarantee all minorities and all ethnicities national rights. In this provision, the Communists were calling all people on the territory of Yugoslavia to make a step toward recognition of Jews, Gypsies, and other minorities and to treat them accordingly.

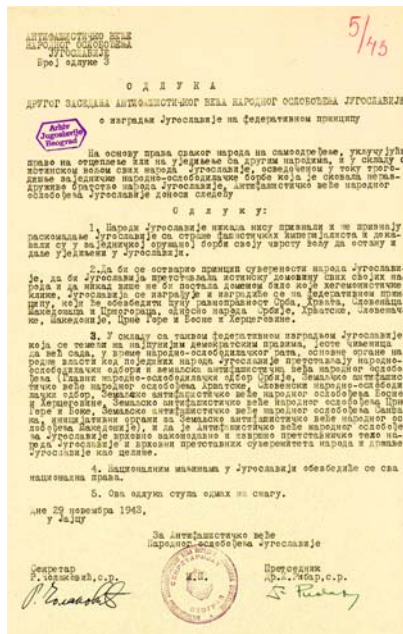


Figure 17: Decision of the Second Meeting of Anti-Fascist Committee for People's Liberation of Yugoslavia. Point 4 guaranteed all national minorities (among which Jews and Gypsies found their voice as well) all national and sovereign rights and privileges (*courtesy of Yugoslav National Archives, arhiv.sv.gov.yu*).

As the war progressed documents in Serbia got destroyed. Thus “much of the evidence related to Serbian concentration camps” and the puppet regime “was destroyed under the orders of the retreating Nazis,” however, some of “the memoirs of survivors of the Banjica concentration camp in Belgrade” survived (Cohen 48). From these documents and memoirs it is not possible to establish a clear picture of what happened, but it remains certain that the puppet regime, voluntarily or forced, did collaborate with Germany and thus was accordingly prosecuted. Minorities in Serbia were given the rights they were promised, with an infinite remorse for the hardships caused them during the years of occupation. As a new Communist leader and president of the country, reaffirming his commitment toward all minorities, “Marshall Tito cultivated socialist fraternity and a unity that took precedence over ethnic differences” (cidc.library.cornell.edu 2004).



**Figure 18: Tito visits the ruins of the bridge across the river Sava which connected Serbian soil with the Croatian terrain, in May 1945 (courtesy of the Photogallery titoville.com).**

### **Life and death in Croatia:**

Hitler allowed “Mussolini to make inland Croatia an independent free state under quisling Ante Pavelic, who also, as in case of Milan Nedic, had no competition for the job” (Adamic 33). The new state included the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Serbia. Pavelic, according to the descriptions of some historians, was a gruesome character, who hid in Italy ever since 1934 due to his fascist involvement and criminal record, and there awaited his return to Croatia as a leader of the Croatian fascists. He was still in Italy when the Independent State of Croatia was created; however, “Germany demanded that a government be named immediately, and that the Ustasha carry out the disarming of the Yugoslav army according to the instructions they had already received in the respective locations” (Dedijer 83).



**Figure 19: Swastika in Zagreb, announcing new government under the leadership of Ante Pavelic, and under direction of Nazi Germany (courtesy of *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*).**

All those who were seeking Croatian Independence embraced this new found ‘free’ state, joining the Ustasha ranks. The Ustasha military ranks took pride in following the example of their fascist friends in Italy, as well as the discipline of their allies in

Germany. Pavelic's Ustasha were to Croatia what Hitler's SS troops were to Germany.

Known for their brutality and lawlessness, Croatian peasantry feared the Ustasha:

After the short-lived war in April of 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided among the aggressor countries: Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, Horti's Hungary and Boris III's Bulgaria. In the meantime, while the war was still being fought, the founding of the Ustasha's Independent State of Croatia (abbreviated as NDH from the Serbo-Croatian "Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska") was proclaimed on April 10, 1941; territories besides those, which were traditionally settled by the Croats, were grafted into this state, including all of Bosnia- Herzegovina and parts of Serbia. There were more than two million Serbs living in the newly created puppet state, who made up one third of the entire population of the NDH. There were also significant numbers of Jews, Roma, and members of other national groups. As soon as the NDH was proclaimed, the leader of this Italian-German fabrication, the head of the Ustasha named Ante Pavelic, began to carry out the Ustasha's program of the creation of a purely Croatian area for living and a " pure Croat nation" ...According to their ideologists, the condition for the creation of a purely Croatian state would be the expulsion of the Serbs ("Greek- Easterners"), the Jews ("Zidovi") and the Roma ("Gypsies"). Claiming that the Serbs were both racially and religiously different from the Croats, they killed them, deported them or forcibly converted them. The Jews and Roma were to be completely annihilated as they were considered to be lower races. The Ustasha government and its jurisdiction passed a series of laws, orders and regulations by which Nazi-fascist methods of terror and ethnic genocide were made legal (the Regulation on

the Outlawing of the Cyrillic Alphabet, the Regulation on Racial Affiliation, the Regulation on Citizenship, the Regulation on Conversion from One Religion to Another, and so on). Yet, the most massive crime against the Serbs, Jews and Roma was carried out outside the framework of those laws and legal documents. The Ustasha acted on their racial, religious and national intolerance without regard for any kind of laws or norms (Bulajic 1997).



**Figure 20: Map of Independent State of Croatia territory in 1943, ally to Nazi Germany (courtesy of National Archives and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

Pavelic’s Ustasha established a new regime, which by no means could have been called a ‘free state.’ Obsessed with mirroring their allies, Pavelic’s regime followed the rhetoric of its Axis sponsors and declared war on Communists and other “undesirable elements.” Following a decree of April 22, 1941, the regime began to purge Serbs, Jews and Gypsies from government service, the military, mass media, business, and other professions (Cohen 91). Others followed this decree, which defined the rights of inferior races:

Two decrees, “The protection of Aryan Blood and the Honor of Croatian People” (No. XLV-67-2-p.1941), and “Belonging to the Same Race” (No. XLV-68-2-p.1941), laid out “the rights of the ‘elite’ and the duties of the ‘inferior races,’” and declared that anyone who had “two or more Gypsy grandparents” was a Rom. The Ministry of the Interior’s Decree No. 13-542 ordered all Gypsies to register with the police on July 22-23, 1941. The Croatian government seized Roma property, while most of the republic’s Gypsies were arrested and sent to Ustasha concentration camps. Over the next two years, some Croatian Roma were sent to death camps in Germany and Serbia, while others were executed “in reprisal for Partisan and Chetnik activities in the NDH.” Estimates are that 26,000 to 28,000 Rom died in the NDH during the Porrajmos (Crowe 220).



Figure 21: April 1941 proclamation of Independent State of Croatia, and a poster detailing the attributes of an Aryan Croat, calling people to cleanse their lands of any undesirables. Translation reads: Great leaders, Adolf Hitler and Dr. Ante Pavelic, call you to defend your homeland and join the volunteer Croatian SS ranks (courtesy of Muzej Revolucije Narodnosti Jugoslavije and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

Even though the racial superiority appealed to the general public, Pavelic was never able to gain greater support with the peasantry, and his Ustasha ruled by fear and with the support of Nazi Germany in order to make the regime survive. General public feared the Ustasha, which made it possible for thousands of innocent people to be tortured, mobbed and killed before their eyes without any intervention:

The voluntary Ustasha militia and Pavelic's Personal Guard, responsible for nearly all World War II atrocities attributable to Croats, numbered 70,000 at their peak in September 1944. Without the direct support of Adolf Hitler, however, the Ustasha regime could not have stayed in power for even months (Cohen 100).



**Figure 22: The official government of NDH (Independent State of Croatia), with Ante Pavelic as president (hand raised). Ante Pavelic, head of the newly created Independent State of Croatia, takes the oath of office in April 1941. (courtesy of Muzej Revolucije Narodnosti Jugoslavije and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**





Figure 16: Croatian fascist leader Ante Pavelic makes his first state visit to Nazi Germany 16 June 1941. From left to right: Pavelic, Hitler, Hermann Goering (*courtesy of JRI*).



Figure 17: A youth organization of the Ustasha Movement was formed on 4 November 1941 by decision of Ante Pavelic. The organization of Ustasha youth covered all youth from age 7 to 21 years old, with separate divisions for male and female, and was divided into: 1. Ustasha mainstay (*ustaška uzdanica*), which covered age 7 to 11 - in primary schools, 2. Ustasha heroes (*ustaške junake*) covered age 11 to 15 - early gymnasium years, and 3. Ustasha Starchevitcheva youth (*ustaška Starčevićeva mladež*) covered all students age 15 to 21. The organization was responsible for education in areas of: a) Ustasha pre-military training, b) religious education, c) propaganda, d) physical education, e) art, f) health, g) social-economic matters, and h) for housekeeping, which was specific training for female youth only ([www.vojska.net](http://www.vojska.net) 2004) (*picture courtesy of JRI*).

Pavelic relied greatly on the help he and his regime received from the powerful Axis ally Germany and adopted any policy he could to please the “hand that fed” his regime. Soon after the racial policies and decrees were adopted, the building of concentration camps began. In addition, Pavelic established the Ustasha youth, who were trained just as Hitler’s youth were, to “embrace” the purity of the Croatian people and be

an effective member of that society. This way he ensured that the concentration camps would be run by his native people, rather than by German troops:

According to the example of their protectors, Nazi Germany and the other fascist regimes, concentration camps were founded in the NDH for the purpose of ‘purifying the nation’ of undesirables. The Ustasha called them ‘collection’ or ‘work’ camps, and they were designed for the mass internment and systematic total destruction of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and ‘objectionable’ Croats. The so-called ‘Ustasha Secret Service’ (or rather its) ‘Department III’ that was also called the ‘Ustasha Guard’ was in charge of the founding, organization, and management of the concentration camps in the NDH. Although they were actually the same, ‘Department III’ took care of the founding, organization, and management of the camps, while the ‘Ustasha Guard’ was assigned to forming military units which guarded the camps and carried out the task of transporting the Serb and Jewish people from the surrounding territories to the camps, and they were also those who killed the prisoners (Bulajic 1997).



Figure 18: Location map of various concentration camps, prisons and waiting grounds distributed through out the territory of Yugoslavia in the years 1941-1945: 1.Lepoglava, 2.Lobargrad, 3.Danica, 4.Kerestinec, 5.Jastrebarsko, 6.Sisak, 7.Bakar, 8.Loznica, 9.Kraljevica, 10.Kapor, 11.Jadovno, 12.Pag, 13.Molat, 14.Zlarin, 15.Kruscica, 16.Jasenovac, 17.Stara Gradiska, 18.Tenja, 19.Djakovo, 20.Crveni Krst, 21.Banjica, 22.Svilara, 23.Sabac, 24.Petrovaradin, 25.Sajmiste (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, numbers added).

Most of the victims were imprisoned at Jasenovac, the largest Ustasha concentration camp in the territory of Yugoslavia, which operated from August 1941, until April 1945 (Cohen 91). Jasenovac remains known as the most brutal concentration camp in the territory of Yugoslavia. It was, however, not the only concentration camp that existed in Yugoslavia. The table below provides limited information about the location and the type of the other concentration camps throughout Yugoslavia from 1941 till 1945.

**Table 1: Information on concentration camps through out the territory of Yugoslavia, with respective locations and description of who ran the camps, what type of camps they were, and possible estimates of how many people died; numbers and the color variation added are inserted for easier overview of the camp map above, shown under fig. 18. The text has been slightly edited to conform to proper English usage (*courtesy of vojska.net*).**

Camp ID	Location	Operated by	Description
	<i>Backa Palanka</i>	Hungarians	
?	<i>7. Bakar</i>	?	?
21. 'Banjica' better known as Jajinci	<i>Belgrade</i>	Germans	Started as a center for hostages, it was the only camp without survivors. Numbers of victims range from 23,637 identified to estimates of 30,000, 69,400 and 80,000.
20. Crveni krst (Red cross)	<i>Niš</i>	Germans	Large camp located in the Nish suburbs next to one of the largest railway marshaling yards. Two estimates of victim numbers are mentioned: 1910 and 2000.
3. 'Danica'	<i>Koprivnica</i>	Ustasha	First camp formed by Ustasha. Mostly Serbs, Jews and substantial number of Croats arrived to the camp with the first transport on April 29th. Some 3000 (or 5000) people went through the camp, average number of prisoners was around 2500 at any given time. In June and July of 1942 Serbs and Jews were sent to Jadovno, Croats were sent to Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac. Camp was closed in autumn 1942.
19. Đakovo	<i>Đakovo</i>	Ustasha	Opened in December 1941, mainly for Jewish women and children, of which around 3000 were in the camp. Large number was executed. Closed in June 1942. The inmates were taken to Jasenovac.
11. 'Jadovno'	<i>Gospić</i>	Ustasha	Opened in June, first camp where mass executions of Serbs and Jews have been carried out. Dead bodies were thrown into deep ravines nearby. Large numbers of communists were also executed in 'Jadovno'. Allegedly number of murdered is around 35,000. Camp was closed in August 1941.
Jarak	<i>Sremska Mitrovica</i>	Germans?	
5. Jastrebarsko	<i>Jastrebarsko</i>	Ustasha	Children's camp - for children from Kozara and from Croatia. 1018 children died in the camp. On August 26th 1942, Partisans liberated the camp and freed 700 children.
10. Kapor	<i>Rab island</i>	Italians	Formed in early 1942, closed with the capitulation of Italy in September 1943. Interned larger number of Jews, Croats and Slovenians. Some 13,000 prisoners passed through the camp. According to the official Italian records 1267 persons died, however, there are only 1079 marked graves. According to statistical calculations the number of killed was 4641.
?	<i>9. Kraljevica</i>	?	?
4. Kerestinec	<i>near Zagreb</i>	Ustasha	First prisoner transport occurred on May 22nd. An escape attempt on the night of July 13/14 failed, and 77 Communists lost their lives. Only 14 managed to escape. Camp was closed soon after that.
15. 'Kruščica'	<i>Travnik</i>		Operated during summer 1941. Camp established (mostly) for Jewish women and children.
1. Lepoglava	<i>Lepoglava</i>	Ustasha	Prison established for officials and supporters of the Ex-Yugoslav Kingdom. Around 1000 people died in it.
2. 'Lobograd'	<i>Zlatar Bistrice</i>	Ustasha	The camp operated from September 1941 to autumn 1942. Together with Serbian women, the camp housed 1300 Jewish women, who were sent from 'Kruščica', together with children to this camp. After the closing of the camp, they were sent to Oswiecim (Auschwitz).

8. Loznica			Approximate number of victims at Loznica: 1,000
13. Molat Island		Italians	
23. Dulag 183	Šabac	?	Total number of murdered reached about 7,320.
12. Pag	Pag island	Ustasha	Operated during the summer months of 1941. Prisoners were sent to this camp from Gospić transit camp. Mass executions were frequently carried out in this camp. During closing of the camp in August 1941, around 3000 Serbs were sent to 'Jadovno,' around 450 Jews were sent to Kruščica (women), and to Jadovno and Jasenovac (men).
Paracin	Serbia	?	?
?	24. Petrovaradin	?	?
18. 'Tenja'	Osijek	Ustasha	First transport occurred in June 1942. Used to gather all arrested Jews who were left in Osijek and Slavonija region, totaled some 3000 persons. Group of 1000 was sent to Oswiecim (Auschwitz) on August 15th, the second group to Jasenovac on August 18th and the last on August 22nd 1942 to Oswiecim (Auschwitz) over Lobograd.
25. 'Sajmište' (Semlin)	Zemun on the Danube, in front of Belgrade	Germans	Estimated number of victims at Semlin: 40,000
6. Sisak	Sisak	Ustasha	Began operating in August 1942, part of Serbian population from Kozara was sent to the camp after the offensive. Mostly old men, women and children. Older prisoners were then transported to Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac.
22. Svilara	Pancevo	Germans	
?	14. Zlarin	?	?
I, II, III, IV	16. Jasenovac	Ustasha	The main and the largest camp in the Independent State of Croatia started operating in the summer of 1941. It expanded Camp No.1 in November by addition of Camp No.2, Camp No.3 and Camp No.4
V	17. Stara Gradiška	Ustasha	In documentations it is mentioned as Camp No.5 of Jasenovac camp complex. Prisoners were transported from Jasenovac to Stara Gradiska and then sent back to Jasenovac for executions

Some writings have been published on these two camps. The number of victims in these publications range from below 100,000 to above one million.

At the end of the war, the records of the Ustasha acts and government were destroyed to prevent Allies from obtaining any concrete evidence. The Independent State of Croatia was absorbed back into the federation of states, and as part of Yugoslavia, it was pardoned and never accounted for the atrocities committed. Due to lack of

information, lack of interest in accounting for Gypsy victims, and fear to admit fault, the truth was readily forgotten under Tito's rule, where all were adopted back into the state as part of a social fraternity.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Jasenovac: The end station**

“The third largest concentration camp in World War II, the Jasenovac concentration camp, is also the least known in the world, and for most of the people in western countries unknown. A suppressed chapter of history indeed” (Djuric 2003).

#### **The beginnings of death at Jasenovac:**

Located on the junction between the rivers Sava and Una, the town of Jasenovac lies on the train route between Zagreb and Belgrade. Even prior to the outbreak of the war the region was well known for its factories on the outskirts of Jasenovac, and for its predominantly Serbian population. Doctor Milan Bulajic, the director of the Museum of Victims of Genocide in Belgrade, explained possible reasons for the particular choice of the campsite in the Museum’s English Language Exhibition Catalogue (MEC):

The choice of the wider region of Jasenovac for such a monstrous camp was made for several reasons. One of them was certainly the suitable geographic position. The Zagreb-Belgrade railway was in the vicinity and was important for the transport of the prisoners. The rivers Sava, Una and Velika Struga, in the middle of the swampy Lonjsko Polje area, surrounded the terrain so that the escape from the camp was almost impossible. On the other side of the Sava, the Gradina region was hardly accessible, often flooded by the river, uninhabited, and far from all witnesses. It was the ideal place to hide mass murders. The other possible reason for the choice of this place were the existing factories in its vicinity; these were workshops for the manufacture of chains, blacksmith shops, locksmith

shops, brick factories, lumber mills and so on. The camp was easily presented in the public as a work camp (Bulajic 1997).

Djuric's account describes the establishment of the complex:

The first inmates, consisting mostly of Serbs and Jews, were transported to the village of Krapje, twelve kilometers west of Jasenovac, and ordered to construct a camp which became officially known as "Jasenovac Camp No. I." As the number of prisoners continued to swell, second camp was founded between Jasenovac and Krapje, which became officially known as "Camp No. II." Inmates had to build both of these camps alone and in great haste, constructing barracks and dikes that were constantly overwhelmed by floods. The Ustasha finally realized that both locations were unsuitable for camps, so they liquidated them and founded alongside the "Brick Factory" in Jasenovac a new camp, which became officially known as "Camp No. III." In the town of Jasenovac itself, the Ustasha turned the leather factory into "Camp No. IV." The camp in Stara Gradiska, not far from Jasenovac, was sometimes mentioned in the Ustasha reports as "Camp No. V." Together, these camps could receive up to 7,000 prisoners, but there were never more than 3,000 to 4,000 men on labor detail, not even when Camp No. III housed a variety of workshops (2003).

Once the terrain was evacuated, the unwanted local population was relocated either to other areas or to the camp. With all the construction done, the site became a well hidden machine of forced labor and death. As such, it fully operated until the end of April 1945 (Bulajic 1997).





Figure 23: Maps detailing the location of the Jasenovac camps (courtesy of Jasenovac Research Institute and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Research Division).

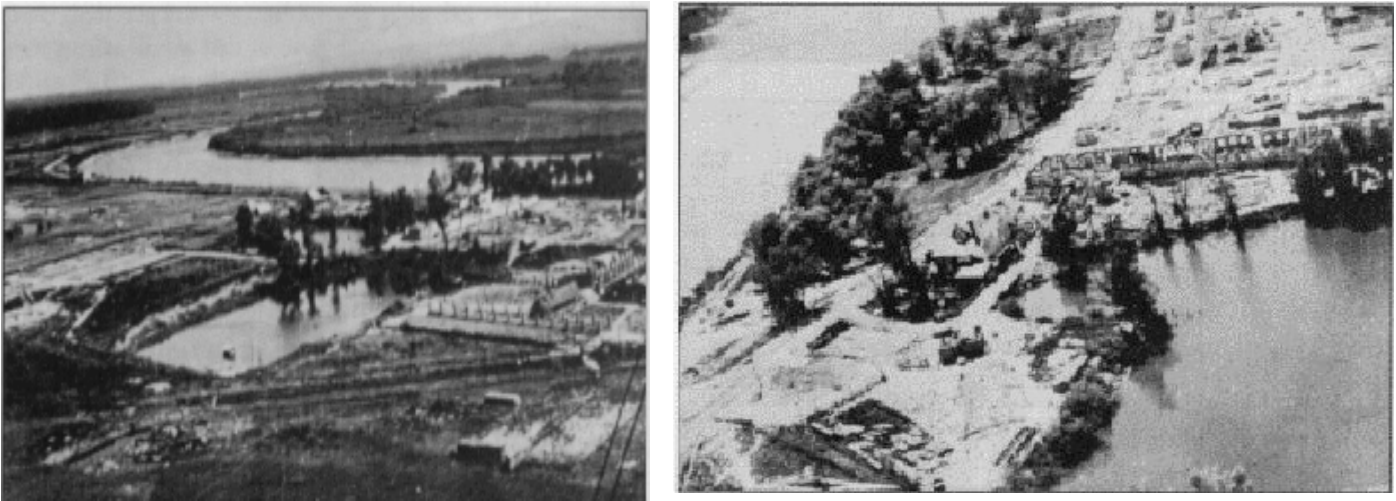
Mihael Sabolevski describes in greater detail the camps in the Jasenovac complex:

Before the foundation and gradual construction of the Jasenovac camps (starting at the end of the summer 1941), smaller or larger groups of people [...] had already been imprisoned in various transit centers and camps. However, the Jasenovac system of concentration camps was the first systematically constructed

group of camps (in literature and original documents, including those of the Independent State of Croatia, these camps were given different names, the most frequent being: Jasenovac Transit Camp, Jasenovac Concentration Camp, Jasenovac Transit and Labour Camp, Jaseonovac Labour Camp, etc). It was the largest in area in the Independent State of Croatia both in the number of prisoners who passed through it and also in the number of people who were killed there. If we add that the camp worked continuously until the end of April 1945, for almost four full years, we get a clearer picture of the human suffering that took place in that terrible place.

For a short period of time in the summer of 1941 the Ustasha authorities organized the camps Brocice and Krapje (numbered camps I and II), which were disbanded at the beginning of November of that same year. The remaining inmates were moved to the newly founded Jasenovac Camp in the Bačić brickyard, numbered as Camp III in the Jasenovac camp system. Later other parts of the system were founded, Camp IV (the tannery in Jasenovac) and Camp V (Stara Gradiska). There were some temporary camps, as well, like the Gypsy camp in Ustice, and the labour camp for women in Mlaka. The largest were Camps III and V. Camp III, in the Bacic brickyard (*see Fig.5*), was encircled by high barbed wire, and during 1942 and 1943 by an additional wall, 3 meters high and 3,360 meters long with many watchtowers. It consisted of 53 barracks, which were mostly dwellings for the prisoners and various workshops. Camp V in Stara Gradiška was similarly structured but was located inside the buildings and the walls of a former penitentiary, and had 35 various structures.

Units of the Ustasha Defense insured the security in the camp itself. Strong military Ustasha were concentrated in the camp, around it, and in the wider Jasenovac area throughout the existence of the camps. It would have been very difficult to liberate them although there were plans to do this in the People's Liberation Army since the spring of 1942 (Sabolevski 102).

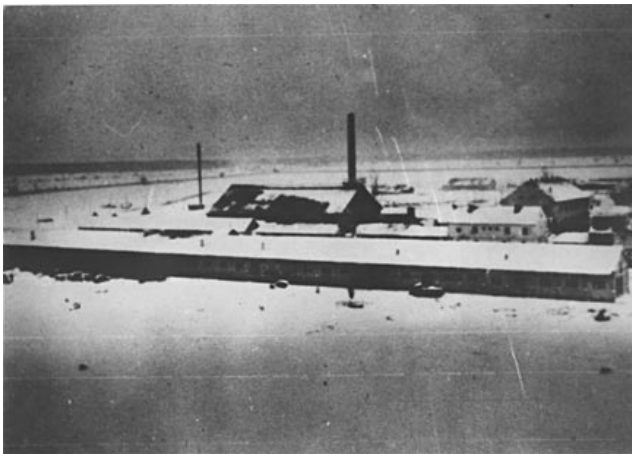


**Figure 24: Two aerial photographs of the Jasenovac camp during the last days of World War II (Yugoslav Cinemathek Nr. 3080/ Nr. 3083.) (courtesy of JRI).**

The Jasenovac Research Institute (JRI), an institution organized by the survivors of Jasenovac, shed additional light about the campsite. In this statement the survivors estimate the number of people, who died in Jasenovac, stating:

Jasenovac was actually a complex of five major and three smaller "special" camps spread out over 240 square kilometers (150 square miles) in south-central Croatia. Along with hundreds of thousands of Serbs, some 25,000 Jews and at least 30,000 Roma were murdered in these camps. The names of some 20,000 murdered children of all three nationalities, collected thus far by historians, provide only a hint of the scale of the crimes committed against children.

Jasenovac is also known for having been one of the most barbaric death camps of the Holocaust because of the extreme cruelty in which its victims were tortured and murdered. Jasenovac was not the only death camp in fascist occupied Yugoslavia, but it was by far the largest and the one in which a majority of the some one million victims of racial genocide in World War II fascist Croatia were exterminated” (2003).



**Figure 25: Jasenovac campsite in winter 1942. At this point, the camp was fully operating as a death camp (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

The people of Croatia were aware of the existence of the camps. In fact, “the Ustasha's newspapers announced to the public, on August 23, 1941, that the first barracks for prisoners had been built near the villages of Brodice and Krapje, and that the camps would be used for the draining of Lonjsko Polje (a valley near Jasenovac)” (Bulajic 1997). At first, “ the prisoners actually worked on building the dike, but under indescribably hard conditions and terror. Those who did not die from the exhausting work and hunger, being immediately buried in the dike, were killed when the camp was liquidated” (Bulajic 1997).

The Ustasha, however, attempted to present Jasenovac to the outside world only as a work camp for outlaws:

The Ustasha's propaganda tried to present the concentration camps both to their own people and to the world as places of useful work and reformation. The wider area of the camp was strictly guarded. Only the confirmed Ustasha with specific tasks were allowed in. Even the Germans, as allies and friends, were not allowed to enter the camp freely. Under the pressure from abroad, especially from the Germans, on February 6, 1942, an International Committee was allowed to visit the camp Jasenovac, to see the way of living and working in it. In that delegation, the Pope's emissary was also included, Monsignor G. Massuci.

Three days before that, Ljubo Milos, the commandant of the Jasenovac camps, had summoned all the prisoners and ordered them to clean the camp, tidy the dining room, kitchen, and hospital. The prisoners were given the sort of food that they had never had, or would have when the visit was over. After the visit, the photographs of "the workers at their machines" in well-equipped workshops, and of the camp clinics with the staff in immaculately clean white uniforms were sent to the world from Jasenovac. The camp was presented in such a way that it seemed desirable to be in Jasenovac in that wartime of general uncertainty, death, and poverty, without the slightest premonition of what was actually hidden behind those photographs (Bulajic 1997).

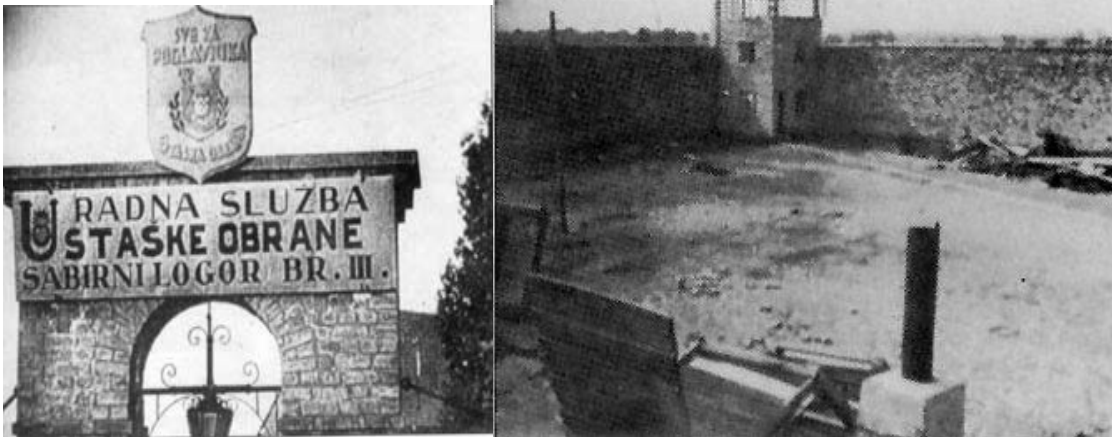


Figure 26: Entrance door to the Camp III stated: working unit of the Ustasha defense, Complex of Camps No.III (courtesy of JRI).

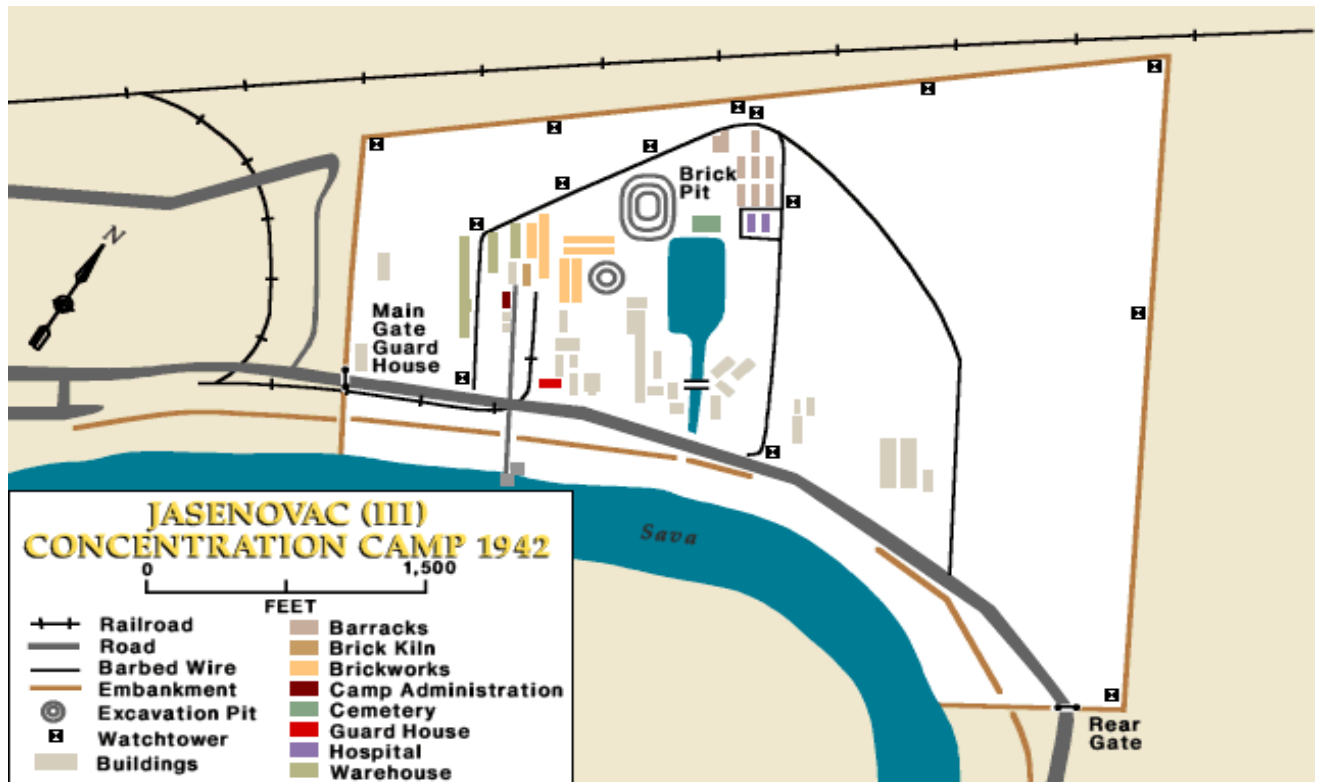


Figure 27: Jasenovac Camp No.III site, the Bacic brickyard (courtesy of War Museum Yugoslavia and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).



**Figure 28: Ciglana, Camp III, the brick factory. The photograph was taken after an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the tile factory, which the Ustasha used as crematoria (courtesy of Muzej Revolucije Narodnosti Jugoslavije).**

The brutality and massacres soon became too obvious, and some of the Croatian population voiced complaints. The Ustasha, however, persuaded them to withdraw the complaints in exchange for their personal and families' safety. The atrocities continued and when they reached their peak in early 1942, a delegation from Germany inspected the campsites and admonished the Ustasha. "The conditions improved only for short periods during visits by delegations, such as the press delegation that visited in February 1942 and a Red Cross delegation in June 1944" (Gutman 1995). During their visit, even the Nazi generals were amazed at the horrors of Jasenovac:

General von Horstenau, Hitler's representative in Zagreb, wrote in his personal diary for 1942 that the Ustasha camps in the NDH were "the epitome of horror," and Arthur Hefner, a German transport officer for work forces in the Reich, wrote on November 11, 1942 of Jasenovac: "The concept of the Jasenovac camp should actually be understood as several camps which are several kilometers apart,

grouped around Jasenovac. Regardless of the propaganda, this is one of the most horrible of camps, which can only be compared to Dante's Inferno" (Bulajic 1997).

However, the improved conditions due to German admonition lasted only a very short time and were of limited success. German officers held no authority over the Ustasha, and the Ustasha were aware of their ultimate power over the prisoners in Jasenovac. In his book, Vladimir Dedijer recounts a verbal exchange between a German officer and an Ustasha, in which the Ustasha were admonished to stop the brutality, due to continuing protests:

On the basis of the great protest against their crimes, the Ustasha decided in December 1942 to interrupt the massacre for a while. They did this because the Nazis were facing unexpected difficulties from the extent of partisan war. The German schoolmasters were accusing the Ustasha of causing the rebellion by the open liquidation and the poorly hidden blood thirsty, gruesome activities, which were driving the people to defend themselves out of despair. They did not say this out of humanitarian reasons, but out of fear of a rebellion in Yugoslavia, the neighbor to the Third Reich. The German fascists had been convinced that they could break any resistance in Yugoslavia with their terror. Since they had been mistaken, they now placed the guilt for their failure on their lackeys.

A German officer intervened in Jasenovac. At the office of an Ustasha administrator, he spoke for another, "more humane" treatment of the incarcerated citizens and attacked the gruesomeness of the butchers. "What do you want? We



are doing everything that you told us and taught us to do!" replied the Ustasha and thus shut him up (267).

The Ustasha claimed that all they did in Jasenovac was the result of commands received from higher authorities. Even though Jasenovac has been named the Yugoslavian Auschwitz, the historians have agreed that the brutality of Jasenovac exceeded the death machine in Auschwitz, and that "with their sadism and pathological crimes, the Ustasha even outdid their Nazi German masters" (Bulajic 1997). The Jasenovac Research Institute expands this statement and claims that:

Its significance lies in the way in which the crimes have been concealed.

Historians have called Jasenovac "the dark secret of the Holocaust" and "the suppressed chapter of Holocaust history." Public recognition of the tragedy that occurred there has been suppressed either partially or completely by governments and institutions for a variety of reasons (JRI 2003).

According to the forceful claims by the Institute members, approximately 300,000 to 700,000 people of various nationalities died in Jasenovac, however, the concentration camp remained forgotten, maybe partially because it did not operate as a facility primarily created to annihilate Jews, but rather Serbs and Gypsies (JRI 2003). Some earlier estimates calculate a loss of approximately 500,000 to 600,000 people in the Jasenovac camps. The varied data makes it impossible to know the precise number of Jews, Serbs and Gypsies who died in the camp:

It is difficult to establish the number of victims killed in the Jasenovac concentration camp, since many documents were destroyed. The prisoners' files were destroyed twice (at the beginning of 1943 and in April 1945) and even if

they had been preserved, they would have been of little help discerning the truth, because the Ustasha often killed the newly arrived prisoners immediately, without putting their names into the files. This is particularly true of those who arrived from Slavonia, Srem and Kozara, because it was only noted down that 9, 83, or 155 wagons had arrived. For instance, a very small number of Gypsies was filed, only a few hundred, while it is known that all 25,000-35,000 of them from the NDH were killed in Jasenovac. The Jewish community in Yugoslavia has established the number of 20,000 Jews that were killed in Jasenovac (Bulajic 1997).

Another source adds to the puzzle of Gypsy losses, stating:

Statistics for Roma victims are difficult to assess, as there are no firm estimates of their number in prewar Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The best estimates calculate the number of Roma victims at about 26,000, of which between 8,000 and 15,000 perished in Jasenovac (Jewish Virtual Library 2004).

Finally, Djuric attempts to elaborate on the number enigma in his introduction:

However, in a *number of* Jasenovac reports, it is mentioned in several places, quite specifically, that all Roma from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia were gathered and killed in Jasenovac, numbering about 40,000 (which includes the territory of modern Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Srem, and even Backa and Banat, under Hungarian and German control) (4, *italics added*).

All these resources only add more confusion to the already difficult matter and make it hard for the historians to give an accurate and exact number of Gypsies' losses in the concentration camp at Jasenovac.

### **The methods and tools of death at Jasenovac:**

Transports from Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia arrived on a regular basis. An account of witness Janka Nikolic, a Gypsy himself, depicts the rounding up and collecting of Gypsies:

There were on a continuing basis about 120 Yugoslavian citizens of Gypsy heritage in Miholjac. They were farmers, or in the agricultural sector of the village. There were some workers, salesmen, and musicians among them. In May 1942, all these Gypsy families were told they were being relocated to another spot where they could work the land and acquire permanent residency. The NDH authorities reached this decision, which was a cause of avid discussion among Gypsy population. The next day, the NDH authorities blocked off the area with Gypsy houses, and the Gypsy families were told to pack their belongings, and to take with them only the most necessary items. All Gypsies, both young and old, left their homes and were summoned to the train station, where in the meantime authorities had already summoned Gypsies from the entire D. Miholjac region...It was a great number of people, but I could not estimate how many. They were packed into animal cargo train wagons, which were then sealed, and the trains drove off in the direction of Osijek...Later on we heard stories about their being taken to camp Jasenovac. One of the Ustasha, or better said father of the Ustasha, told me that all the Gypsies were taken to Jasenovac, where they were forced to dig their own graves before they were brutally killed (Ackovic 9, 10, *my translation*).

Trains from various regions in Croatia reached the camp according to a weekly schedule. Many of the prisoners, especially in the case of Gypsies, however, reached the camp on foot or were ordered to run. Witness Kustorin Marijan described this trip to Jasenovac:

On 23 September 1944 I was relocated from Stara Gradiska camp to Jasenovac with a group of 700 people. For nearly the whole trip, some thirty-eight kilometers, we had to run. Anyone that stopped or staggered was killed on the spot. The road followed alongside the Sava, so many exhausted comrades jumped into the river in desperation, to end the suffering (Djuric 16).

Family groups often dragged all their belongings to the camp, such as clothes, jewelry, and caravans with chairs, blankets, bedding, and tents in hope that they were only being falsely charged, since the prisoners were sent to the camp due to a “sentence” issued by the Ustasha Police:

For an inmate to be sent to Jasenovac meant submitting to the mercy and cruelty of his Ustasha tormentors; it meant martyrdom. The dark history of the Jasenovac camp reveals that the Ustasha sent all elements that were to be liquidated there; those who were deemed disloyal to the régime “for racial, religious, national or political reasons.” Today, we can determine that the Ustasha sorted prisoners into two categories. The first category comprised all inmates who were sentenced to detention for duration of less than three years. It was the intention of the Ustasha to exhaust these prisoners by labor to their physical limits, and then remove them to make room for new prisoners (*see Fig.13*). Only a few prisoners were released after they endured their sentence, and many of them later died from the

consequences of their experiences in the camp. The second category comprised inmates who were sentenced to detention for the maximum duration of three years. Prisoners sentenced by the Ustasha Police Service for duration of three years were, as a rule, liquidated immediately upon their arrival. Both categories have in common the fact that the prisoners were sent to the camp on basis of individual “sentences” handed down by the Ustasha Police Service (Djuric 10).

At the entrance to the camp, the prisoners had to leave all of their belongings. If they were allowed to proceed through the gate and enter the camp, and had a good blanket, that blanket was exchanged for an old one. Bulajic comments in his Museum Catalogue English Language summary:

The system of mass murder in Jasenovac was already in place in the fall of 1941, as soon as the larger transports of people began to arrive. Men, women, and children arrived to the camp by rail, truck, horse-drawn cart, or simply running at the insistence of the Ustasha, equipped with rifles. Places of mass execution were found all over the Jasenovac camp. Most of them were located on the right bank of the Sava from the Dubicki limepits downriver, and especially in the village Gradina (Bulajic 1997).

From this and the previous account it follows that most people, once stripped of their belongings, were immediately executed. Only few survived the entry gate:

On their arrival most were killed at execution sites near the camp: Granik, Gradina, and other places. Those kept alive were mostly skilled at needed professions and trades (doctors, pharmacists, electricians, shoemakers, goldsmiths, and so on) and were employed in services and workshops at

Jasenovac. The living conditions in the camp were extremely severe: a meager diet, deplorable accommodations, a particularly cruel regime, and unbelievably cruel behavior by the Ustasha guards (Gutman 1995).



**Figure 29: Gypsies in the winter of 1942. Gypsies reached the camp on foot or with their wagons (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

Prisoners were humiliated and tortured in all concentration camps. In Jasenovac, however, the Ustasha cared for little and killed their victims with much amusement:

Unlike the German camps where industrialized genocide was conducted, in Jasenovac that genocide was done in a way never recorded in the history of the human race. All which was negative, pathological and criminal, which characterized the Ustasha movement as a whole, reached its peak in Jasenovac (JRI 2003).



**Figure 30: Gypsy wagons enter the gate to the Camp Site III (courtesy of *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*).**



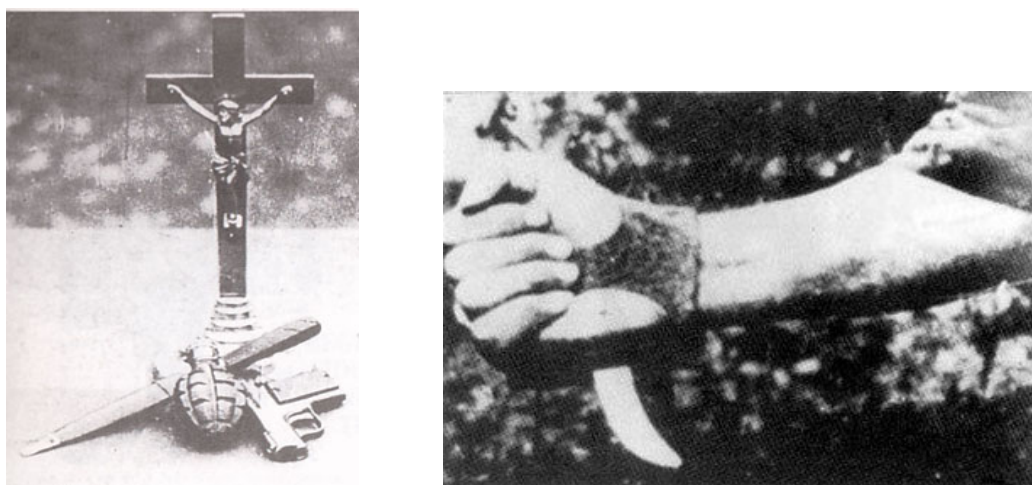
**Figure 31: The Ustasha search through the belongings of the prisoners at the gate of Camp III (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

Besides meager meals and cruel work circumstances, prisoners were subjected to immense emotional, physical, and psychological torture and humiliation:

The prisoners and all those who ended up in Jasenovac had their throats cut by the Ustasha with specially designed knives (*see Fig.9*), or they were killed with axes, mallets and hammers; they were also shot, or they were hung from trees or light



poles. Some were burned alive in hot furnaces, boiled in cauldrons, or drowned in the River Sava. Here the most varied forms of torture were used; finger and toe nails were pulled out with metal instruments, eyes were dug out with specially constructed hooks (*see Fig.14*), people were blinded by having needles stuck in their eyes, flesh was cut and then salted. People were also flayed, had their noses, ears and tongues cut off with wire cutters, and had awls stuck in their hearts. Daughters were raped in front of their mothers; sons were tortured in front of their fathers. Said plainly, in the concentration camps at Jasenovac and Stara Gradiska, the Ustasha surpassed all that even the sickest mind could imagine and do in terms of the brutal way people were murdered. People in Jasenovac were no longer human beings, but rather objects, which were available for the every whim of the Ustasha (Bulajic 1997).



**Figure 32: The usual tools of killing; next to it a picture of a knife-glove, specially devised by the Ustasha to help in the process of killing and to ease the burden of having to hold the knife during the mass executions (*courtesy of JRI and Muzej Revolucije Narodnosti Jugoslavije*).**

Once they entered the camp, prisoners' human rights and dignity disappeared. They were under the jurisdiction of the guards, who in turn could deal and dispose of them at any time and in any circumstance they pleased. An Ustasha could kill any prisoner and not be held accountable, or required to report and register the action taken:

The following episode is based on the testimony of witness Danon Jakob. On 23 December 1941, Milos Ljubo, one of the worst Ustasha murderers, ordered that all prisoners assemble for muster. He pointed out that one of the inmates tried to kill an Ustasha guard. He did not mention the name of the prisoner, nor of the Ustasha the prisoner tried to kill. Milos Ljubo then separated twenty-five prisoners from the line, grabbed a rifle and shot them all. Then he called for Dr. Gusti Leindorfer to make sure they were all dead, after which he called for the undertakers to take away their corpses. Then he added, joking, "Oh, I forgot to ask for their names" (Djuric 22).

Besides "usual methods," which were used in other concentration camps throughout Europe, such as revolvers, machine guns, knives, gas chambers, hanging, freezing, and starvation, Jasenovac was infamous for its burning methods, as well as for experimental torture with axes, wooden hammers, bombs, hatches, iron bars, hammers, and hoes. I remember my grandmother telling of people lined up next to the river Sava, and being forced to kneel and beg before the Ustasha, who bet they could kill up to ten with one stroke of an axe, or of a wooden hammer. The bodies would be pushed into the river (*see Fig.15*) and would float all the way to Belgrade. The river was colored red, and the stench of the bodies was so strong that it smelled for kilometers. These were, however, fast and "boring" ways of execution. The "interesting" executions provided the

Ustasha with entertainment. One of the few main “entertainment” activities consisted of "surprise deaths.” Dedijer recounts one of the many stories:

We saw how they liquidated at the door of this walkway. When the victim exited at the other side, he or she looked around uncertainly and suddenly stopped directly before the closed door. The victim suspected something. Was it the smell of blood and splattered brains that instinctively led him to suspect the deadly blow in the next moment? Almost every victim stopped before the door that led into oblivion and over which the mechanical hammer was hanging that would smash his head. Then the guard pushed the prisoner and screamed: "Why are you stopping? Go on! Forward! Into the camp!"

The door was thrust open and the victim made an indecisive step forward. Immediately behind him, the Ustashe closed the door quickly. Then the Ustashe in the hallway broke out in laughter. "Into the camp! Hee hee hee, ha ha! He's already there! Ha ha ha! He's gone to the devil!" they laughed and didn't get serious again until they heard the steps of the next victim.

“Faster, man. We don't have time for your elegant promenade. You're waddling.”

Later the guard told us about it quite openly. Behind the door, an Ustasha was hiding with a hammer in his hand. The victim unsteadily took two or three steps forward and then the Ustasha henchman dealt him a blow to the head.

Some prisoners watched these events. I looked around to the co-witnesses of these terrible murders of the people from Zagreb. The camp prisoners who dared risk their lives to see this horrifying scene were shaken by a convulsive laughter. They had to laugh about the death grimaces so much that tears came to their eyes. There

is nothing astonishing about the reaction of these witnesses. Because of the constant stimulation, the torments, and tortures of the prisoners, the old prison inmates watching this gruesome scene were totally stunned. Every prisoner became numb because he knew that surely the same was awaiting him, and often he even wished for a quick death (236).

Another form of entertainment was rape. Accounts of eyewitnesses and survivors, as well as the accounts from my grandmother, speak of extreme pain and humiliation inflicted upon women who were made to have intercourse with dogs, as well as act out pleasure while being raped with machineguns and bayonets, to dance naked in front male prisoners before they were taken on by 10 to 20 guards one after another or to eat their own or their children's flesh after their wombs were cut open (*see Fig.12*).



**Figure 33: Gypsy woman with her children as they enter the camp. Women were main targets of sexual abuse in the camp. Gypsy children (picture taken sometime at the end of 1942) were used to liven the mood through their song and dance prior to their execution (*courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*).**



**Figure 11: Women's barracks. The separation of men and women was conducted for one reason only: easier access to rape victims (courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**



**Figure 12: Women who were raped, or whose flesh was cut or used to extinguish cigarettes, after having satisfied the bestial preferences of guards were mutilated and killed (courtesy of JRI and Professor Edmond Paris 311).**

Few girls escaped the bleak fate. One of these girls was Kristina Jevtic, my grandmother. During a round up in Zagreb in October 1941, she was mistaken for a boy and placed in the men's prisoner camp at age 14. Prisoners, though they knew she was a female, kept the secret and continued to protect her from the Ustasha. Until she escaped at the end of January 1942 with a group of Partisans, she witnessed some of the atrocities committed on young and old, male and female. My father retold some of her experiences:

During the winter, she was able to hide the fact that she was female, because she would bandage her breasts and wear layers of clothes and material to keep “warm.” She and the men were taken twice outside the camp to work in the fields. The Ustasha guards would beat them without reason and shout at them the whole time. Some of the blows were deadly, and then prisoners would have to drag the bodies back to the camp. Being of small build, she was able to hide in the mass of tall prisoners and escape some of the blows. She often witnessed groups leaving for water and never returning from the river. First to go were Jews, then rich Serbs and Gypsies. Later on, as new prisoners arrived, she heard them speak of dead bodies floating down the Sava river for days. Because she was with men she only heard groans and shouts from the women’s camp. Everyone knew the daily routine of brutal rape in the women’s section of the camp. She avoided being anywhere near it, for fear of being found and put with them. One day though, she witnessed a young pregnant woman being cut open with hooks by a few guards. Her unborn child was ripped out of her womb and butchered to pieces by bayonets. The woman remained half open on the table for days, left to die slowly. The Ustasha used her womb as an ashtray and played cards as they watched her die in immense pain.



**Figure 13: Prisoners working in the field. The production of goods continued under harsh circumstances, such as heat, floods, starvation, exhaustion, freezing temperature, lack of clothes and shoes (courtesy of Muzej Revolucije Narodnosti Jugoslavije).**



**Figure 14: Victims' eyes were dug out with specially designed hooks. The prisoners were often subject to injection of various chemicals as part of experimental process (courtesy of JRI).**

She spoke of gruesome tortures. Nails were hammered into toes and fingernails. People were left naked in the freezing cold all night long with barbwire all over their bodies, or hooked on the barbed fence and crucified. The prisoners could hear the piercing cries produced by pain and freezing cold all day and all night long. When they were fed, they were fed soup with a potato peel or two, and a slice of bread here and there that was so thin one could see through it. She said the Ustasha called this thin slice of bread "Pavelic portion." One day she watched as a group of the Ustasha held a tournament. They collected as many children as would fit in a little house, piled them in there, and then shot and counted how many they killed with one bullet (*see Fig. 18*). These experiments and others, like cutting ears, poking out people's eyes, and making them crush their own eyeballs, were some of their favorite activities. When night came, she tried to close her ears not to hear the pain stricken shouts from the other side of the camp, the women's section. When, at the end of January 1942, she overheard Partisans plan an escape, she demanded of the leader to be taken along. She knew once spring came, she would not be able to hide the fact she was a female for long. The

Partisans knew it too and decided to chance it and take her along. She remained with the Partisans and fought till the end of the war. The years of Jasenovac, however, left an imprint on her mind, which followed her for the rest of her life. I remember her screaming at nights in her sleep. She was restless after that for days. She spoke of the war and the camp very seldom, but when she did her whole posture and look would change, and she looked pale, exhausted and worn. She never stopped suffering from the months spent in Jasenovac (*Personal testimony, my translation*).



**Figure 15: Bodies thrown into the river would float sometimes all the way to Belgrade (courtesy of JRI).**

Dedijer's account stands as another powerful witness of the horrible treatment of prisoners through forced labor, meager meals and terrible living conditions:

The lunch meal in Jasenovac consisted of a completely watery, salty soup with some potato peels. In the evening there was turnip soup, sometimes with five or



six beans. The bread was to amount to 65 grams per day. On three to four days in the week, no bread at all was distributed. Accordingly, the calories in the food did not amount to more than 500 per day, which is a deficit of 2000 to 2500 calories for every prisoner. You can imagine how quickly the prisoners in the concentration camp at Jasenovac lost weight, for the work was precisely calculated and organized. On the basis of physical exertion, many suffered from acute heart disease and died of paralysis of the heart muscle. Collapsing from heart disease was common. It happened most frequently in the tile factory. About five to eight people died every day of acute heart failure (265).

All these ways to torture the frozen, starved, and exhausted crowd were for mere entertainment of bored guards. When these forms would not satisfy the guards, and a person caused a rage in the Ustasha, for one reason or another, they would often incorporate the few methods to produce a “whole body treatment”:

The well known industrialist and philanthropist Milos Teslic (*see Fig. , 16*) 26 years old, from Sisak, was cruelly tortured and murdered by the Ustasha. His legs were broken, ears cut off, eyes gouged out, chest stabbed and finally the heart was extracted through a big hole made in his chest. According to the witnesses testimonies the Ustasha present claimed that the heart of the tortured Milos was still beating on the palm of an Ustasha after it was taken out (Paris 311).



**Figure 16: The body of Milos Teslic, after a “treatment” by guards. The photograph was taken by an Ustasha and found in his pocket at a later date (courtesy of Edmond Paris 311).**

Even though the Ustasha did not distinguish between different prisoners, and everyone in the camp expected to die in similarly brutal manners soon after their arrival in the camp, they seemed to have had a special preference for Gypsies. Men were used to dig graves or act as henchmen before they were killed or starved to death. In his journal, Franciscan Miroslav Majstorovic Filipovic, one of the commanders in the camp wrote, “the Gypsies, who came to the camp in large numbers at this time, raised our spirits with monkeys and bears, songs and music” (Dedijer 278). Gypsies got chosen as gravediggers and henchmen, maybe because of their stereotyped reputation as criminals, and evildoers:

After 1942 *the Ustasha* also used Gypsies. Prisoners would first have to dig long and deep pits. The Ustasha would strip them naked, kick the gold fillings out of their heads, and then the victim would have to jump into a pit, where an Ustasha or a Gypsy would wait and hit the victim on the head with a sledgehammer or cut the victim’s throat with a knife (Djuric 25, *italics added*).

Another account, by a witness Milos Petrovic, sheds additional light to these brutal practices:

After the liberation I talked to some Gypsies from Jankovac, region of Vinkovci, Nikola and Toskan Petrovic, or maybe Radosavljevic. They both were able to escape from the Jasenovac concentration camp. Both told me that Gypsies were sent en masse to the concentration camp and that they were liquidated each night by hundreds, either with sledge hammers or axes...Before the Gypsies were taken to the execution site at the bank of the river Sava, they had to leave their bags and clothes. Once in their underwear, they were executed, and some, as one of them told me, dug mass graves in which the corpses would be thrown. Many times people were still alive when they were thrown into the pit (Ackovic 21, 22, *my translation*).

These two men survived to tell the story. The fate of most Gypsies, however, was to be mercilessly killed, and buried in a pit they dug with their own hands. The first big liquidation of all Gypsies in the camp took place in 1942:

From March 1942 until the end of the year, Camp No. III was constantly full of men, women, and children brought there by the Ustasha in large groups to be liquidated. To begin with, the Ustasha gathered *all* Gypsy men and women from across the so-called Independent State of Croatia, numbering about 40,000 people, and transported them to Jasenovac.

All Gypsies were gathered in the field located between the “old wire” and the great wall in the northeastern part of the camp. The area was enclosed by special wire and guarded by several sentries. The Ustasha named it “Camp No.III-C,” (C for Cigan or Gypsy) because at first only Gypsies lived there, in their tents or out in the open, hungry and barefoot, in the heat of the sun and without shelter during

storms. Their food was even worse than that received by the other inmates and the Ustasha beat and whipped them with particular delight, and forced them to beat and kill one another. At night they took them in groups to Gradina, forced them to dig their own graves, and then finished them off with sledgehammers or hammers. Thus the Ustasha liquidated within a few months every Gypsy man and woman, young and old alike. Only a few Gypsies saved themselves, primarily those who stood out by diligent work building the dike and the wall around the camp. The Ustasha spared them, and took them to the villages of Gradina and Ustice, where they assigned them work as undertakers and executioners. This group of Gypsies survived for a long time. They lived in village houses, received good food, and drank to excess. It is significant that none of them tried to flee. Their duty was to dig graves in Gradina for the victims who now arrived in Jasenovac for the sole purpose of being liquidated, to execute victims with sledgehammers or hammers, and to bury them afterward. Although they fulfilled their duty as slaves, in the end they, too, learned how little the Ustasha's promises were worth. In early 1945, the Ustasha killed them all, in order to eliminate all witnesses to their crimes (Djuric 43, 44).

Dedijer comments on the pit and hole digging, concluding:

Prisoners, usually Gypsies, who were later killed, dug them. Without knowing for whom they were intended, they were digging their own graves, so to speak.

Prisoners, who escaped the Ustasha knives in Gradina saw Gypsies who were themselves killing with hatchets. I also heard from prisoners in the camps that

these Gypsies, forced by the Ustasha to help them in the mass murder, chopped off heads of other prisoners (234).

The accounts already mentioned all depict the brutality of the camp, as well as its similarity to the Nazi camps established throughout occupied Europe. They also testify that Gypsies were treated with no respect, and that their lives were, just as was the case of Jews, worth nothing. Their race was selected for complete extermination. The following account, taken from the minutes at the trial of Artukovic, in the courts in Vinkovci, Kotor, 10 March 1952, tells of the fate of those Gypsies who found themselves in this whirlpool, and who experienced this racial annihilation. This was the hearing of Milan Radosavljevic senior, son of Tanasi, from New Jankovac, born in New Jankovac, 43 years old, illiterate. The testimony was recorded at the trial of Dr. Andrija Artukovic, who was charged with criminal action according to the articles 124, 125, and 128 of the KZ:

My heritage is Gypsy. Since my birth and until May 1942 I have lived in the New Jankovac village, Vinkovci, where I worked as a collector and salesman. In my spare time I burned coal since I owned no land. I had a family consisting of my wife Kaja, 30 years old, and three children, Živko, who was 12 years old, Marko, 7 years old, and Katica, 4 years old. About 830 Gypsies lived in New Jankovac at the start of the war. In May of 1942, sometime before the Saints holiday, the Independent State of Croatia magistrate summoned all the heads of the families to register all members of their family. During the interviews we were informed that we would be moved to somewhere in Romania or Banat, and that there we would receive our own land and home. However, that same night, armed, uniformed men

rounded up our Gypsy community, and we were all forbidden to leave. The next morning we were forced out of our homes and were escorted to the town Vinkovci. We had only the necessities and some food with us. Some of the Gypsies, who owned horses, gathered their belongings on wagons and took them along. When we arrived in Vinkovci, the Ustasha began to beat upon us with sticks, pushing us into a secluded area, fenced by barbwire, right next to the river behind the bridge. We spent the night there, and I noticed that Gypsies from the villages Mikanovci and Privlaka were summoned to the same spot with us. The following morning, we were taken to the train station and shoved into cattle wagons that were shut behind us. We could take only the most necessary things, while the horses and all the rest of our belongings remained where we had spent the previous night. We were locked up in the train the whole afternoon, until the train finally began to move. The wagons were overcrowded, and we could not get anything to eat or drink. We knew we have been deceived and would die, and in the realization of our circumstances, many Gypsies wailed and cried. Early the next morning, right after sunrise, we arrived in Jasenovac. The train stopped in front of the camp; once again, the Ustasha pushed us toward barbwired area. They separated us from our women and children, and men were ordered to turn in all their money and anything else of value. Then they were taken back into the fenced area, with no buildings or living quarters. I believe about 1000 men were present there. About 20 meters away was another barbed wire fence where the Ustasha placed our wives and children. Our camp was situated next to the bank of the river Sava. That day the men remained untouched, but we received no food.

During the night we could hear occasional cry outs and shouting, and we knew that the Ustasha were raping our wives and daughters. The following morning, the Ustasha led a group of women and children out of the fenced area and took them somewhere. Since their fenced area was in my eyesight, I saw that my wife Kaja and our children were in the group. Almost an hour later, the guards came to our camp and asked if anyone was willing to work. I replied in the affirmative because I wanted to find out what happened to my wife and children. A small group of Gypsies volunteered along with me. The 12 of us were separated, and under armed accompaniment, we were taken by the ferry to the other side of the river Sava, to Gradina. I could not find the group of women and children I was looking for, but instead found myself in an uninhibited area with some barracks. We were given shovels and asked to dig a pit about 20 to 30 meters from the bank of the river. That day we went about digging two holes, each about 8x5 meters and probably 3 meters deep. These pits were next to each other, with 3 meters of space between them. When we returned from work that night, we noticed that the guards protected the barracks, and it was obvious that there were people inside the barracks. Around 10 or 11 that same night, we could hear shouting and wailing coming from the direction of Gradina and the barracks. The following morning we were led back to work and we passed by the holes we had dug out. As we approached the holes, I saw a pile of Gypsy women's wear. As I arrived at the sight of the holes, I was devastated to see that the space between the holes was drenched in blood. The holes were half way filled and covered with dirt. However, the dirt could not completely cover the bodies in the hole, so that the

contents of these pits remained visible. All of us were shocked at the sight. One of the men from our group, Uzo Mitrovic, Gypsy from Novi Jankovaci, about 40 years old, whose wife was with the previously mentioned group of women and children, began to scream and jumped into the river. The Ustasha immediately fired shots after him and he never again emerged from the depths of the river. The rest of us dug more pits that day. As we were returning to our camp that evening, we noticed another group of women on the other side of the Sava bank. There were about 50 or 60 souls in the group. I did not notice any children. They carried nothing with them. After we crossed the river, they were all pushed onto the ferry and were transported to Gradina. That night we heard more shouting and screaming coming from Gradina. The third day we dug in Gradina, however, these pits were about 200 meters away from the other pits. Since I did not pass the holes we dug out the day before, I could not see if anything was in them. That evening when we returned to the camp, there were no women and children in the neighboring camp. The men asked us if we saw them anywhere. I cannot recall if I heard any cries and shouting that night. The fourth day we dug out holes about a kilometer away from the bank. That day another group of Gypsies was brought to help dig the holes, and I remember seeing Mitrovic Toso and Mitrovic Milan, both Gypsies from Novi Jankovaci, that still live there today. The Ustasha led away another group of about 50 men in the direction of the hole we had finished the day before.

They were wearing only their underwear. One of the men in the group jumped out and ran our direction. He ran for some time, and then, hit by the bullets of the



Ustasha, he fell into a puddle of mud in front of him. The guards that were keeping an eye on us told us to lie down flat on our stomachs and not to look in the direction of the other group, so we would not know what was happening. I put the palms of my hands over my eyes; however, I managed to peek through my fingers, and since the terrain was flat, I could see that the Ustasha began hitting the group of men with some heavy objects. I assume they were hammers or some sort of heavy sticks, because rows of men began falling to the ground immediately after being hit. They were probably tied up together with strings, and once one fell into the pit, the others followed. We could hear shooting and shouting. This took place in a short amount of time, maybe 200 or 300 meters away from us. After they were done, they commanded us to stop working, and we again went to the north bank of the river Sava, where we carried some bricks.



**Figure 17: Photo of an Ustasha in a pile of dead Gypsy bodies, as well as a photo of a mass execution, dates unknown. Sometimes Gypsies were part of the executions, in hope of being kept alive if they cooperated (courtesy of JRI and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).**

The next day we dug more next to a graveyard, with some uninhabited houses in its proximity. One day we almost got shot at that spot, because a group of guards assumed that we were to be executed, and as we were ordered to lie down flat on

the ground our guards showed up, and explained that we were hole-diggers. I remember that I met a group of Gypsy men that night as we returned from digging holes. There were about 100 to 120 men, all tied with wire. They were men from our camp, and among them I saw my father and asked him, where he was going to which he replied "To a dinner." It was forbidden to carry on a conversation of any sort, and one of the guards hit me in the head. That night, in our camp, the only men we noticed were those performing physical labor, while the rest of men had been taken somewhere else. As we passed the cemetery the following day, we saw the holes we dug out the days before. They were almost filled to the brim with earth, and everywhere around them lay articles of clothes. We could also see through a broken door a pile of clothes in one of the houses next to the cemetery. I dug holes in Gradina for 12 days. During that time, I saw that transports of men, women, and children arrived to Gradina, without even passing through the camps. I remember that one of these groups was ordered to sing some wedding songs. I assume they were all killed and piled into the holes we dug every day. Due to the fear that we might get killed ourselves just like the other men in the camp, we dug a passage beneath the wire one night as it rained hard and fog covered the guards' sight, and escaped. Shots were fired on the group and some men got hit and died, but I can't tell who the men were, because I was one of the first people to escape. Later I met up with my two Gypsy friends, Toso and Milan Mitrovic, who escaped with me that night and were able to save their lives. After the escape, I joined the Partisans, and stayed with them until the end of the war. From the members of my family that were taken to the camp, no one ever returned. It is

obvious that they were murdered and thrown into the pits I dug. From the Gypsies who lived in Novi Jankovaci, only five or six souls were able to survive, while all the rest died in Jasenovac. Among those who died were my father, Tanasije, 60 years old, mother Mileva, 60 years old; my brother Marko, 32 years old, his wife Julka, 30 years old and their two children Luka, 6 years old and Katica 4 years old; as well as my brothers Stevo, 15 years old and Slavko, 8 years old (Ackovic 33-40, *my translation*).

Next to the witnesses of the Gypsies who escaped the concentration camp and survived the war fighting or hiding, Ackovic's book presents witness accounts of those in charge of round ups. Among them, he included an account of a notary who helped summoned the Gypsies from his village to be taken to the camps. The account of this witness is a testimonial to the knowledge and helplessness or lack of desire of the people to do anything about the fate that awaited Gypsies. The minutes were taken on 21 August 1951, during the witness hearing of Ivan Bauer, 41 years old, conducted in the court of Djakovo, Kotor, in a lawsuit against Dr. Andrija Artukovic, who was charged with murder:

During the occupation I was a notary in the village of Strizivojna, Kotar Djakovo. I was born in a neighboring village, Vrpolju and was a notary for the Strizivojna village even before the occupation. Because of the nature of my work, I was familiar with the internal affairs of the village itself. During the occupation, I had to execute tasks given me by the Independent State of Croatia Ministry with great urgency. One day, I do not remember the exact day any more, I believe it was in August of 1942, the police authorities came to my house, and demanded a list of

our local village guards, which they needed to employ that night. At first, they did not want to tell me why they needed the list. Later, however, they did admit that they received an order from Kotor, and Kotor from Zupe, to transport that evening, or better said that night, all the Gypsies residing on the territory of the village to a camp. I immediately informed the village guards and assisted the police authorities with the lists of village guards. In the evening that same day, or to be exact that night, after the Gypsies had already retired, the police officers woke them up and rounded them up. They were all arrested and taken to the camp Jasenovac. From there only a handful returned, while all the rest died in the camp. If I recall correctly, there were ten families of Gypsy heritage, with about 60 family members that lived in the village at that time. They were honest and respectful people, so they did not do any of their “usual” business. The Gypsies were surprised, very frightened and did not show any resistance to the orders, but executed them according to guards’ instructions. By the next morning they were all in the Jasenovac camp. I remember that among those Gypsies in Strizivojno, there also lived the family of Josip Filipovic, who was in the military at that time. His wife and five small children were all taken to the camp and, according to the testimonies of those that returned, were liquidated. I know exactly that, to this day, they have not returned to the village, thus I believe that they did die in the camp. I know that Nikolic Joca, who was about 50 years old at that time, with his wife and three children did not return from the camp nor did any members of his family. I correct my testimony, Nikolic Joca was with his wife only, and did not have any children, but Nikolic Aleksandar had the children I previously

mentioned when I spoke of Nikolic Joca. Among the Gypsies taken was also Nikolic Laza, about 50 years old, who was married and had two children. As I said before, about 10 or 15 families were taken to the camp that night. I was interested to find out where these orders were coming from, and why they were issued. I found out that Dr. Andrija Artukovic issued the orders for all Gypsies in the Independent State of Croatia to be arrested and taken to the camp Jasenovac. I am certain that after that order, all the Gypsies in the territory of the Djakovo region were taken to the camp, and that only a few returned. Nothing else of this matter has come to my knowledge, except for the rumor I heard that all Gypsies in the territory of the state were taken to the camp at about the same time as the ones from our village. Signed, Ivan Bauer (Ackovic 13-16, *my translation*).

From these and other accounts it follows that the Ustasha treated all the Gypsies with the same brutality. Whether they were nomads, or lived in the community they were rounded up and deported. Sometimes Ustasha played with the prisoners by fostering in them false hopes of survival. They pretended to be willing to free those who collaborated, assisted in executions, or did other acts of “service.” This false pretence was first noticed in the case of children. The Ustasha did not have a clear agenda as to what should be done with the prisoner’s children. For one reason or another, they let the children live, only to implement a harsher action. This is vividly shown in the following account about the children:

Throughout 1942, Camp III-C was swarming with children brought to Jasenovac together with their parents. During liquidations, many children lost track of their parents, and other prisoners took them in. Many prisoners thus hid the orphans

whose mothers and fathers had been killed, sharing their meals and depriving themselves of food for the benefit of children. Inmates permitted to receive packages with food from home gave all of it to the children. Near the end of the summer of 1942, Luburic (a camp officer) noticed the children in the attics of workshops and in the barracks, and he ordered the Ustasha to search the whole camp. Thus it was discovered that there were over four hundred boys and girls in the camp, ranging from four to fourteen years of age. Luburic consulted with his officers and—to the inmates' surprise—had the children registered and placed in special rooms. He identified several male and female teachers among the inmates, and ordered them to teach the children to read, write, and sing. This little “kindergarten” became the sole joy of the inmates in the camp. Their happiness did not last long. Matkovic Ivica, Kapetanovic and Sliskovic Ivan were not satisfied with the results; it seemed to them that the children's upbringing did not emphasize enough the Ustasha spirit. Aside from that, they had established that these children were mostly Serbian and Jewish. When Luburic returned to Jasenovac, they reported their findings to him. He ordered that they be killed, particularly as they had become a burden to the supply budget. The Ustasha took the children in groups of sixty to eighty each to Gradina, where the Gypsies killed and buried them (Djuric 50).

After this mass killing of children, every Ustasha had free range in dealing with a child in whichever manner he pleased. An additional account shows the brutality with which children were treated:

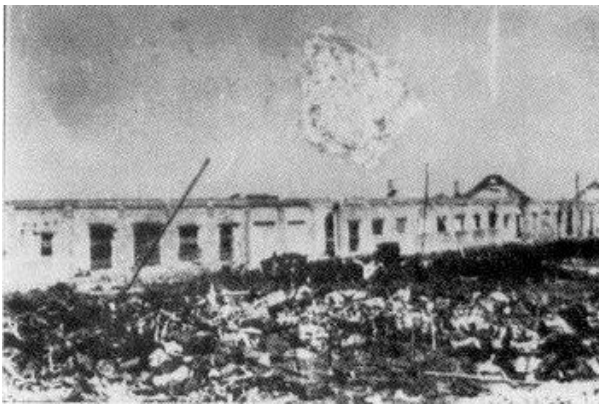
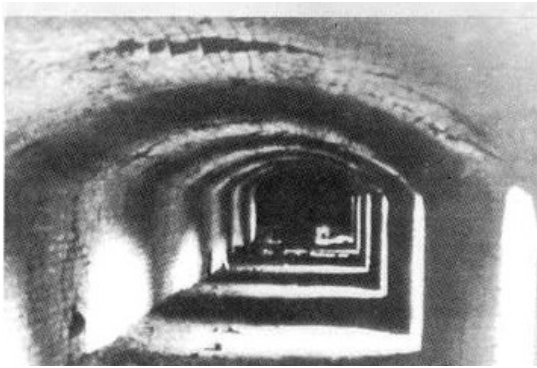
In the Dakovo camp, the Ustasha tormented children before the eyes of their mothers by throwing breadcrumbs among the starving children and setting police dogs on them as soon as they approached the bread. When a raging dog had bitten a child, they locked the child and the dog in some corner of the camp, before the eyes of the horrified mothers. While one could hear the screaming of the child that was struggling with the incited dog, the Ustasha played harmonicas (Dedijer 292).



**Figure 18: Children were among the first victims of starvation. Often they were used as objects of sexual satisfaction for the guards' entertainment, or as dog's food (courtesy of JRI).**

From its forms of forced labor to death of children, Jasenovac was a camp established for the purification of the country for the benefit of the Aryan race, and as such was perfect for the disposal of all undesirable races and people, both old and young.

One can pose the question whether Jasenovac can be numbered in a list of “true death camps.” Did it have a crematorium like Auschwitz and some other death camps throughout the German occupied territory? One of the reasons why the Ustasha chose this site was to solve the problem of having to build a crematorium. Among the many factories in the Jasenovac area, was also the Ciglana tile factory, with its big tile ovens. These ovens were often used as crematoriums and as means of disposal after mass executions.



**Figure 19: The tile factory, which was converted to a crematorium (*courtesy of JRI*).**

The tile ovens seemed to be insufficient by themselves, however, maybe because they were not brutal enough. They were employed only in combination with other torture techniques mentioned in this chapter. Dedijer describes how this was done:



...Picili set to work to reconstruct an oven...in the tile factory. He divided the big tile oven into several ovens with a common chimney. Each oven could hold a train-car-load of people, i.e., forty to fifty and twice as many children. In this improvised Ustasha crematorium 450 to 460 people were incinerated in one night. I saw this oven when I walked through the execution site. It was a long tunnel. The individual ovens were very large and wide, about 3x4x3 meters. The door was opened from outside, from the tunnel.

The people were brought into the notorious tunnel right up to the oven; there they stayed until night. Then they were killed with rods, knives, axes, wooden hammers, iron hammers, or sometimes with a pistol or a rifle. This caused a terrible panic, but no one could get out of the tunnel. The prisoners huddled together with bloody heads; they were completely beside themselves, and everyone tried to hide behind someone else. They almost suffocated, they screamed, and they pled to God. But everyone had to die and neither God nor anyone else could offer a single spark of hope. The Ustasha surrounded them in this arena, and there was no escape. Some would lie down and pretend to be dead in hope to be saved that way. These suffered the most. The janitors and crematorium employees came and bore them to the big iron door. One opened the hellish gate and a hot, stinking stream of air heated the faces. The victim was thrown into the fire of this pyre of Jasenovac; screams could be heard, millions of sparks from the body's fall and its last twitches were blown upwards, flames rose, then the dull thud of the heavy iron door. The dead could, of course, not cry

anymore; they only caused millions of sparks to rise and spread the smell of burning human flesh, an evil, sweet stink (241).

In essence of the word death camp, the activities in Jasenovac, one of the most brutal torture places in all of Yugoslavia, would rightfully classify it as a “true death camp.”

### **The ends of death at Jasenovac:**

Repeated attempts of break out were unique to Jasenovac camps. The attempts to escape from other camps under German rule are not frequently mentioned in the Holocaust literature. Some of the attempts to escape from Jasenovac were successful, but many more were unsuccessful. The few successful attempts occurred in the beginning of the camp’s existence. At this point prisoners were still physically able and strong enough to break out and fight. The additional advantage was that the guards were still unfamiliar with the grounds. Unlike the prisoners in any other camp, prisoners in Jasenovac were native to the land, and knew the region and the conditions that awaited them once they escaped. This gave them a greater hope for survival and courage to attempt an escape, since it was their country and their home. In one of these brave undertakings, my grandmother escaped with a group of resistance fighters and fought her way through the woods in winter to the Partisans. But after the winter of 1942, that same terrain became the main obstacle for any attempts of liberation from outside. The flat area around the camp afforded visibility for kilometers. A surprise attack was impossible. As the war progressed, some air attacks by allied force on March 30 and 31 announced to the Ustasha guards and the prisoners that the winds of war were changing. During the “bombing about 40 prisoners were killed and many wounded. Fires broke out and set off

several explosions” (Djuric 57). It became necessary to clean up and destroy any evidence still in existence:

At the beginning of April 1945, the Ustasha were preparing the liquidation of the Jasenovac camp in order to remove the traces of their crimes before escaping. The ultimate liquidation of the Camp was begun on April 20, when the last large group of women and children was executed. On April 22, 1945, under the leadership of Ante Vukotic, about 600 people armed with bricks, poles, hammers and other things, broke down the doors, shattered windows and ran out of the building. About 470 people were sick and unable to fight barehanded with the armed Ustasha, so they did not take part in the rebellion. The 150 meter long path to the east gate of the camp was covered by the crossfire of the Ustasha machine-guns, and many prisoners were killed there. A large number of them were killed on the barbwire of the camp. About hundred prisoners managed to break out through the broken gate of the camp. Only 80 prisoners survived while 520 of them died in the first assault. The Ustasha later killed the remaining 470 within the camp (Bulajic 1997).

The Ustasha continued to kill, burn, and set on fire everything within the walls of the camp through the first two days of May 1945. The camp was liberated on May 2, 1945. Or better said, the camp was approached that day, because at that point there was nothing left to liberate:

The Jasenovac camp was not liquidated until the very last battles were being fought. The Yugoslav Army forces entered the Stara Gradiska camp on April 23,

and Jasenovac on May 2, 1945. Before leaving the camp, the Ustasha killed the remaining prisoners, blasted and destroyed the buildings, guardhouses, torture rooms, the “Picili Furnace” and *all* other structures. Upon entering the camp, the liberators found only ruins, soot, smoke, and dead bodies (Bulajic 1997).



**Figure 20: Children and adult survivors liberated by the Partisan army at the end of April 1945. None of these people were liberated from Jasenovac, but from smaller camps through out Croatia and Serbia. Jasenovac produced only the corpses of dead people (courtesy of JRI).**

Many of the pictures available and used to document the atrocities of Jasenovac were mostly found in the pockets and in the possession of the Ustasha guards, who loved taking pictures of their brutality. During the Ustasha trials only a handful of survivors testified, and there were only a few Gypsies among these witnesses. All these survivors escaped the camp. None survived in the camp to tell their story. This unfortunately did not stop the accused from bearing false testimonies. At the trial of the Franciscan Miroslav Majstorovic, one of the Commanders in Jasenovac, also known under nickname “Brother Satan,” he testified in the following manner:

Killing of prisoners with wooden hammers took place in Gradina; specifically the victim climbed down into the ditch and was then hit from behind with the hammer. The murders also took place by shooting and slaughtering. I know that in the liquidation of girls and women in Gradina, the younger ones were raped. The decision about this was made by Ivica Matkovic, while, as far as I know, the Gypsies, specifically the grave diggers among them, committed the rapes. I myself committed no rapes (Dedijer 283).

Such and similar testimonies, though only few in number blamed Gypsies for the gruesome atrocities. All those Gypsies accused were dead and buried in one of the many pits. They could not stand to defend themselves against accusations of having raped their own women and children. Once again, the stereotype and prejudice toward the Gypsy race was used to hide the atrocities. Gypsies, who suffered on the grounds of racial discrimination, and who were tortured and belittled, did not receive an invitation to testify and receive any reparation costs. European communities did little to break down

the prejudice toward them, but concentrated on Jewish question. Gypsies continued being used as scapegoats, and their name was made dirty through claims such as the one made by “Brother Satan.” Thus, their Holocaust was not over yet.

### **Epilogue to the deaths at Jasenovac:**

In the year 1965, the government set up a memorial site due to persistent pressure coming from the survivors and from the families of those who died. The big stone flower, built as a monument for all the fallen prisoners, reached to the skies as it opened towards it in hope, pleading with God to accept the souls and spirits of those whose mortal remains lay spread over the Jasenovac grounds. In 1991, the new Croatian State declared Jasenovac Memorial Area, due to its flora and fauna, as an area of protection, and reduced its significance as a Memorial Site of victims of WWII Yugoslavia:

At the end of September 1991, the Croatian Army entered the Jasenovac memorial park by force. According to the Hague Convention on the protection of historical and cultural monuments, the Croatian Army severely broke the agreement by entering the protected area. Although the international public was informed about the desecration of the memorial park, there was no response. The Serbian forces liberated Jasenovac Memorial Park on October 8, 1991. During its withdrawal, the Croatian Army placed explosives and blew up the bridge across the River Sava, which connected the two parts of the Memorial Park; they also blew up the graves, destroyed the Museum artifacts and stole the Museum equipment. Individuals who worked at the Memorial Park saved some historical materials and objects through courageous and enthusiastic efforts (Bulajic 1997).

Among the destroyed objects was the stone flower, a memorial to the dead people. Reconstruction of the stone flower has not been discussed since the destruction. The war and the civil conflict within the country swept away the memory of death and devastation that went on in Jasenovac. Along with this memory is the memory of the victims. They were not only Jews or Serbs, they were Croats, and Gypsies. All became the same as their corpses were piled in the pits and burned in the ovens. However, the historians have not remembered them as equal in their agony, and have used the lack of material and information to push the memory of Gypsies aside. Their plight was marginalized because they were only “asocial, criminals, thieves and beggars.”



**Figure 1: “Cvet” of Jasenovac. The flower of Jasenovac, designed by Bogdan Bogdanovic, stood to suggest the “idea of overcoming suffering and insanity.” Museum was built underneath the flower. Some documentaries made from the original footage taken by the Ustasha, photographs, and artifacts such as these handcuffs, and prisoner’s shoes were available to visitors and the public (*courtesy of JRI*).**

## **Chapter 4: Porrajmos, The Great Devouring**

In the Roma language, the experience of World War II has assumed the common name of *Porrajmos* or “The Great Devouring.” Where as secondary literature uses the term *Holocaust* to refer to a systematic killing and devastating loss of life in concentration camps and *Shoah* to a unique experience of Jews in Nazi Germany and occupied territory, the great devouring speaks of the Gypsy annihilation in the past and at the same time of their present plight in not being recognized with other victims:

The Anti-Defamation League’s website defines *Holocaust* as “the systematic persecution and annihilation of more than six million Jews as a central act of state by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.” The program for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Scholars’ Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches defines it as “the Nazi attempt to annihilate European Jewry,” and makes no mention in its pages of Roma people (Hancock 2003:2).

The “Holocaust” of the Gypsies did not end the day Nazi Germany capitulated. Unfortunately it continued, but its form has changed. The lack of records and definite numbers make it difficult to give an accurate statement on how many Gypsies died. Misinformation about Gypsies in World War II continues to be a problem, and many scholars debate whether Gypsies should be included in the Holocaust at all. Thus in the numbers game and in continued ignorance of Gypsies’ inclusion in the Final solution on racial basis, *Porrajmos* continues to eat at the memory of those who died and the lives of



those who desperately try to commemorate the souls of the victims. The Nobel Prize winning author Günter Grass explains this by saying:

Weil die Roma, zu denen auch die in Deutschland lebenden Sinti gehören, wie kein anderes Volk, außer dem der Juden, anhaltender Verfolgung, Benachteiligung und in Deutschland der planmässigen Vernichtung ausgesetzt gewesen sind. Dieses Unrecht hält bis heute an. Selbst als Opfer der verbrecherischen Rassenpolitik während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus werden die Roma und mit ihnen die Sinti nur zögerlich anerkannt; während der Völkermord an den Juden, wenn auch gegen Widerstände, sich unserem Bewusstsein eingepägt hat, wird die Vernichtung von mehreren hunderttausend, das heißt, ungezählten „nichtslebenswerten Zigeunern“ in den Vernichtungslagern Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sobibor, Treblinka und an vielen anderen Orten des Schreckens allenfalls beiläufig erwähnt. Schlimmer noch: Als es vor einigen Jahren in Berlin darum ging, ein Denkmal für die Opfer des Rassenwahns zu errichten, sollte ausschließlich der ermordeten Juden gedacht werden. Verlegen und mit hinhaltenden Ausreden wurden die ermordeten Zigeuner sozusagen auf die Warteliste gesetzt. Bei allem guten Willen, den ich den um das Denkmal bemühten Gremien und Initiativen nicht absprechen will, blieb es bisher bei dieser empörenden Ausgrenzung, als stünde das Volk der Roma und ihre Opfer noch immer unter dem Verdikt, einer minderwertigen Rasse anzugehören...Ihre Existenz ist von gleich bleibend starren Vorurteilen beschwert. Man hat sie diskriminiert, verfolgt und während zwölf Jahren, als nach deutschen Rassengesetzen Recht gesprochen wurde, deportiert und in Konzentrationslagern

ermodert. Sie werden, wenn Schuld eingestanden wird, vergessen oder allenfalls beiläufig genannt...Sie sind wie ohne Stimme (Grass 13, 14, 34, 35).

### **Ignorance about the Gypsies' Holocaust:**

On 16 September 1986, as Elie Wiesel addressed a wide range of audience in his Nobel Peace Prize speech, he stated:

I confess that I feel somewhat guilty towards our Roma friends. We have not done enough to listen to your voice of anguish. We have not done enough to make other people listen to your voice of sadness. I can promise you we shall do whatever we can from now on to listen better (Tanner 1997).

His speech was one of few moments of public acknowledgment of the lack of help Gypsies have received in their fight for recognition. However, only a year earlier, in 1985, the Mayor of the City of Darmstadt, Guenther Metzger, told the Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma that their request for recognition "insult[ed] the honor of the memory of the Holocaust victims by aspiring to be associated with them" (Tanner 1997).

This statement shows that the struggle has received a new shape. It is an old battle, however, that began after World War II:

Only ten percent of the hundreds of millions of dollars made available by the United Nations for the survivors, and which the U.S. Government was given the responsibility of disbursing, was set aside for non-Jews, and none of that found its way to the Roma survivors, who number today about 5,000. Roma were not mentioned anywhere in the documentation of the U.S. War Refugee Board, which was able to save the lives of over 200,000 Jews. When the U.S. Holocaust

Memorial Council was established in 1980, no Roma were invited to participate, and it only has one Roma member today. Roma are barely a part of its Museum even now, being located in a corner on the third-floor set aside for "other victims" (Hancock 1997).

The war did a little to stop the centuries-long prejudice against the darker skinned people, who found themselves in an eternal devouring with Jews: "the Roma have traveled a road which differs little from pre-war roads. They still face discriminatory laws, deportation, violence, and exclusion, with war crimes reparations yet to be paid to them" (Miller 1998). Yet many statements have been made and published that hold Gypsies responsible for their own fate, due to their asocial and criminal nature, which made them "unsafe" and justified their persecution:

In 1950, the Württemberg Ministry of the Interior issued a statement to the judges hearing war crimes restitution claims that they should keep in mind that "the Gypsies were persecuted under the National Socialist regime *not* for any racial reason, but because of their criminal and antisocial record," and twenty-one years later the Bonn Convention took advantage of this as justification for not paying reparations to Roma people, claiming that the reasons for their victimization during the Nazi period were for reasons of security only (Hancock 2003:1).

Other statements, though paying tribute to Gypsy suffering during the years of Holocaust, make sure to underline the uniqueness of the racial question in Jewish favor:

In the final analysis, as Steven Katz has correctly concluded, "it was only Jews and Jews alone who were the victims of a total genocidal onslaught in both content and practice at the hand of the Nazi murderers." Nazi policy toward

Gypsies lacked the kind of single-minded fanaticism that characterized the murderous assault upon the Jews. Entire categories of Gypsies, such as the ‘socially adjusted’ and the ‘sedentary,’ were generally given more lenient treatment. The Gypsies were considered a ‘nuisance’ and a ‘plague’ but not a major threat to the German people and that is why their treatment differed from that of the Jews...The Gypsy people suffered terribly under the Nazi regime, and there is really no need to exaggerate the horrors they experienced. In order to comprehend fully what happened and why it happened we must pay attention not only to the decisions and decrees issued by the perpetrators but also to the attitudes of the German people to the Gypsy minority. Simplified accounts according to which “Gypsies, like the Jews, were persecuted and annihilated simply and solely on account of their biological existence” are not only a distortion of the historical record but also a hindrance to progress in the relationship between Gypsies and non-Gypsies. Only if we understand why all strata of German society with so much distrust and hostility regarded the Gypsies will we be able to confront the sources of such propensities and prevent their recurrence (Lewy 225, 227-228).

As Lewy said, we need to tell the truth. Which side, however, resembles the truth?

Those who do not support Lewy’s thinking are outraged at the attempt to undermine the Gypsies’ place in the Holocaust books and discussions:

One of the more disgusting means by which Jewish exclusivists have nonetheless attempted to do so, however, concerns their verbatim regurgitation of the Nazi fable that, again contra the Jews, Gypsies were killed en mass, not on specifically

racial grounds, but because as a group they were "*asocial*" (criminals). And, as if this blatantly racist derogation weren't bad enough, the Rabbi Seymour Siegel, a former professor of ethics at the Jewish Theological Seminary and at the time executive director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, compounded the affront by using the pages of the Washington Post to publicly cast doubt as to whether Gypsies can even make a legitimate claim to comprising a distinct people (Churchill 1997).

To tear down the usual stereotypes, Roma organizations began uniting in the 1970s and are becoming stronger and gaining more support in intellectual circles. Their fight is creating an echo, and this echo has caused the debates to continue:

Hartnäckig hält sich bis heute die Legende, die Sinti und Roma seien irgendwie zufällig mit in die Mordaktion geraten. Das stimmt nicht. Der Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma ist aus dem gleichen Motiv des Rassenwahns, mit dem gleichen Vorsatz, mit dem gleichen Willen zur planmässigen und endgültigen Vernichtung durchgeführt worden wie der an den Juden. Ich möchte daran erinnern, dass der Reichsinnenminister Frick bereits am 3. Januar 1936 verfügte, die „Nürnberger Rassengesetze“ seien genauso auf die Sinti und Roma wie auf die Juden anzuwenden. Justizminister Thierack notierte 1942, dass „Juden und Zigeuner schlechthin vernichtet werden sollen“. Hitler selbst ordnete gegenüber Himmler die ausnahmslose Deportation aller Sinti und Roma in die Vernichtungslager an. Sie wurden daher im ganzen Einflussbereich der Nationalsozialisten systematisch und familienweise vom Kleinkind bis zum Greis ermordet (Romani Rose 14).

A bold statement from Professor Herzog, a Roma activist and representative of Roma and Sinti organization in Germany, shapes the fundamental claim for which Gypsies have fought in last fifty years. The documentary evidences to support his claim are many and clear:

The term (*Lebensunwertesleben*) was first used in print by Liebich in 1863 to refer specifically to Roma; it was used six years later in an essay by Kulemann—once more solely to refer to Roma and again in the title of Binding & Hoche’s influential 1920 treatise on euthanasia. And it was used yet again just one year after Hitler came to power as the title of a law ordering sterilization, which was directed inter alia at the Roma. Roma were classified as possessing “alien” (i.e. non-Aryan) blood along with Jews and people of African descent following the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, and in November that year marriage between members of those three groups and Germans was made illegal. Statements against Roma referring to their being a “racial” problem are numerous and well documented (Hancock 2000).

As was the case of Jewish plight, Gypsies were persecuted, rounded up, and annihilated because they were a “subhuman race,” and their presence endangered the dream of Adolf Hitler. To show they were a social and racial threat “at Auschwitz, Gypsy prisoners wore a "Z" for Zigeuner (Gypsy) tattooed on their left arm and a black triangle, for "asocial," was sewn into their clothes. The Nazis entered them into the Gypsy register with simply a "Z" after their names, for just being a Gypsy was reason enough for them to have been arrested. At the hands of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*), the Roma faced "scientific" and "medical" experiments in addition to death in the gas chambers” (Miller

1998). And yet, these facts seem not to be enough to acknowledge the pain and sorrow of the Gypsies as a race, but have rather been a cause for heated debates, and I dare say, a war of words in which some scholars deny Gypsies the right of claiming persecution on racial grounds, since they were not systematically killed as Jews were:

Several writers have written that there was no Final Solution of the Gypsy Question, for example Breitman (1991:20) who wrote “whatever its weaknesses, ‘Final Solution’ at least applies to a single, specific group defined by descent. The Nazis are not known to have spoken of the Final Solution of the Polish problem or of the Gypsy problem.” Nevertheless the earliest Nazi document referring to “the introduction of the total solution to the Gypsy problem on either a national or an international level” was drafted under the direction of State Secretary Hans Pfundtner of the Reichs Ministry of the Interior in March, 1936, and the first specific reference to “the final solution of the Gypsy question” was made by Adolf Würth of the Racial Hygiene Research Unit in September, 1937. The first official Party statement to refer to the *endgültige Lösung der Zigeunerfrage* was issued in March, 1938<sup>9</sup>, signed by Himmler (Hancock 2003: 3).

Another example of this debate explains the exclusion stating:

Lucy Dawidowicz, for instance, when she mentions *the Gypsies* at all, is prone to repeating the standard mythology that, "of about one million Gypsies in the countries that fell under German control, nearly a quarter of them were murdered." The point being made is that while Gypsy suffering was no doubt "unendurable," it was proportionately far less than that of the Jews... In sum, it is

plain that the proportional loss of the Gypsies during the Holocaust was at least as great as that of the Jews (Churchill 1997)...Consider the example of the Sinti and Roma people (Gypsies, also called "Romani"), whom [Deborah] Lipstadt doesn't deign to accord so much as mention in her book. Her omission is no doubt due to an across-the-board and steadfast refusal of the Jewish scholarly, social and political establishments over the past fifty years to even admit the Gypsies were part of the Holocaust (Churchill 1997).

#### **The numbers game in Yugoslavia:**

In an interview with Alex Bandy, Professor Waclaw Dlugoborski, one of editors of the Auschwitz Memorial Book, agreed on the difficulty of settling the exact numbers of Gypsies' death in World War II, saying that "figures for the number of Gypsies killed in all of Europe vary between 200,000 and 500,000, firstly because the Gypsies were not registered, secondly because many were killed in transit and there is no record of their graves" (Bandy 1997). A scholar in the field, Ian Hancock, comments:

Of the estimated ca. 20,000 Roma in Germany in 1939, fully three quarters had been murdered by 1945. Of the 11,200 in Austria, a half was murdered. Of the 50,000 in Poland, 35,000; in Croatia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Luxembourg, almost the entire Roma populations were eradicated (Hancock 2000).



Godina popisa The census year	Ukupno Roma number of Roma	Udeo Roma u stanovništvu Srbije i Crne Gore Percentage of Roma in the population of Serbia and Montenegro
1948.	72.736	0.5
1953.	84.713	0.5
1961.	31.674	0.2
1971.	78.485	0.2
1981.	168.197	0.7

**Figure 34: The census from years 1948, 1953, 1961, 1971 and 1981. The number of Roma on the territory of Yugoslavia and their percentage in the census of Serbian and Montenegro population, though recorded, are uncertain (courtesy of Federal Ministry of ethnic and minority Committees, Belgrade, [etnickatolerancija.org.yu](http://etnickatolerancija.org.yu)).**

According to the official statistics from the year 1931, there were no Gypsies in Yugoslavia. Rather, “they are classified in the statistics as Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Muslim (under religion), or as people who speak “Serbo-Croatian,” “Slovenian” or “other” languages (Ackovic 28, *my translation*). However, according to the statistics taken after the war, a sudden percentage of Gypsies was found in all of the republics of Yugoslavia. Thus, the census of 1953 states, that “from 17,000,000 inhabitants in Yugoslavia-84,713 or 0.5 percent are Gypsies: 58,800 in Serbia, 20,462 in Macedonia, 2,297 in Bosnia, 1, 663 in Slovenia, 1,200 in Croatia and 230 in Montenegro” (Ackovic 46, *my translation*). This statistic does not reflect the correct number of Gypsies in Yugoslavia because many still declare themselves as Serbs, Albanians, Macedonians, Turks, Romanian, or as “other:”

However, the information and the official statistics need to be considered with caution in the case of Roma population in Serbia and Montenegro in the year 2000. According to secondary sources, there are between 450,000 and 500,000 Roma living in what is today Serbia and Montenegro (Union Ministry of Ethnic and Minority Committees 2001, *my translation*).

Table 10. World War II losses according to the 1964 Yugoslav war reparations census

Location	Mortality	Nationality	Mortality
Bosnia-Herzegovina	177,045	Albanians	3,241
Croatia	194,749	Croats	83,257
Kosovo	7,927	Hungarians	2,680
Macedonia	19,076	Jews	45,000
Montenegro	16,903	Macedonians	6,724
Serbia (proper)	97,728	Montenegrins	16,276
Slovenia	40,781	Muslims	32,300
Vojvodina	41,370	Serbs	346,740
Unknown	1,744	Slovak	1,160
		Slovenes	42,027
		Turks	686
		Unknown	16,202
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>597,323</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>596,293</b>

SOURCE: Željko Krušelj and Đuro Zagorac, "Sporna knjiga mrtvih" [The Contested Book of the Dead], *Danas*, Zagreb, November 21, 1989, pp. 24–25. The figures exclude Axis collaborators. The totals by location and nationality show a discrepancy of 1,030.

**Figure 35: The loss of life recorded in 1964 census, by region and nationality (or race). A “Roma” category is not included, thus their estimates are divided among various nationalities and the “unknown” (courtesy of Philip Cohen 109).**

The war in Yugoslavia and their systematic persecution made Roma very careful. From various documentations and calculations pointed to in the previous chapter, it is obvious that at least 40,000 Gypsies in Croatia died in the concentration camps at Jasenovac, since all Gypsies on the territory of Croatia were deported to the camp. This number, however, does not include Gypsies from the territory of Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, or Serbia. It is difficult to assess the number of Gypsies who lived in Yugoslavia in 1941 and how many died during the years of the war. Most war statistics do not even include “Gypsy” category. Slobodan Berberski, a Roma writer and activist comments:

“In World War II alone, about half a million Roma were shot...However, the exact number of how many Gypsies lived in Yugoslavia cannot be determined. I don’t think anyone knows. No census forms indicated an option ‘Gypsy’ as a possible declaration of race. And, if they wanted to lead decent lives, many of the Roma were forced to declare something else, and hide their race. Some abandoned their traditions, customs and belief system in order to avoid further

persecution. A person must have a lot of guts to say boldly: I am Gypsy. We are speaking of years of constant persecution and humiliation! One must understand the fear most Gypsies lived with all their lives (Ackovic 14, *my translation*).

The 1953 census then accounts for a small percentage of survivors, and if it were true that prior to World War II, no Gypsies lived in Yugoslavia, then it still remains to explain the numbers of Gypsies accounted for at Jasenovac camps. This game of numbers at the Jasenovac death camps has, in recent years, become the most important symbol of Yugoslavian devastation. Immediately after the war, Yugoslavian historians and writers used the numbers to shift blame from one region to the other. Yet that secondary literature, just as in the case of other camps, did very little in acknowledging of the annihilation of the Gypsies and concentrated instead on the deaths of Serbian, Jewish, and Croatian populations. On the other hand, because the documents of Serbian involvement in the killing of Gypsies did not exist, or were very scarce, it was assumed that no Gypsies ever died in Serbia, and that atrocities against Gypsies never took place.

In this battle of numbers, zeros were added and subtracted, and it is impossible today to accurately determine the number that would reflect the truth:

The major problem of Jasenovac history lies in fixing the number of dead...Sadly, there is little consensus on the total number of dead...Historians, using variety of statistics, often arrived at startling different figures: Denic less than 100,000; Vullimany around 600,000; Stitkovac 'hundreds of thousands'; Dragnic: total in NDH 500,000-700,000; Hall 750,000; Glenny 200,000; Ridley 330,000; and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 300,000-400,000 (MacDonald 161).

The exact losses of Gypsy population will forever remain an estimate. In the years since the war, too little time has been dedicated to researching the complete truth and to recovering the records that would show the atrocities committed in the territories of Serbia and Croatia alike. Now this information is not accessible, and witnesses have passed on. The two opposing sides have tried to manipulate events and statistics in the recent years of civil conflict, downplaying some numbers and exaggerating others. These numbers could help determine what happened to thousands of Gypsies who lived in Yugoslavia prior to World War II and who simply disappeared after 1941. The case of Jasenovac statistics shows this:

It was vital to downplay the importance of Jasenovac to prove that the death camp was insignificant by the standards of the Second World War. This performed several important functions. The first was to minimize the historic guilt of Croatia in the war by denouncing Serbian accusations as part of an insidious propaganda campaign. This was meant to restore the prestige of the Croatian wartime record; while exonerating the NDH...Tudjman played a starring role in this debate...*His* theories were controversial. Using various statistics, he arrived at a total of 50,000 killed overall, not just Serbs, and not just at Jasenovac-but for all Ustasha camps in Croatia. He estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 inmates had died in Jasenovac and he listed them as 'Gypsies, Jews and Serbs, and even Croats'- reversing the conventional order of deaths, to imply that more Gypsies and Jews were killed than Serbs...Another high profile writer Ante Beljo, echoing Tudjman's earlier numbers, appears to support a total of 50,000 people killed at Jasenovac, quoting Ivan Supek to the effect that the victims were 'leftist Croats,

followed by some Serbs, Gypsies and Jews, but mainly Communists.’ *Grmek, Gjidara and Simac* numbers include 18,000 Jews and some Gypsies and Croatians (MacDonald 167, *italics added*).

Table 11. World War II losses (by place of origin) according to Kočević (in thousands)

	Serbs and Montenegrins	Croats	Muslims	Jews	Others	TOTAL
Bosnia-Herzegovina	209	79	75	10	9	382
Croatia	125	124	—	17	29	295
Kosovo	4	—	—	1	5	10
Macedonia	7	—	1	6	11	25
Montenegro	45	—	4	—	1	50
Serbia (proper)	114	1	5	8	13	141
Slovenia	—	—	—	1	34	35
Vojvodina	33	3	1	17	22	76
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>537<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>207</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>124<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>1,014</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes Serbs (487,000) and Montenegrins (50,000).  
<sup>b</sup>Includes Albanians (6,000), Germans (26,000), Gypsies (27,000), Hungarians (5,000), Slovenes (32,000), Macedonians (7,000), and others (21,000).  
 SOURCE: Kočević (1985), pp. 65, 70, 79, 89, 93, 99, 120, 124–25, 172–83.

Table 12. World War II losses (by place of death) according to Žerjavić (in thousands)

	Serbs	Montenegrins	Croats	Muslims	Jews	Others	TOTAL
Bosnia-Herzegovina	164	—	64	75	9	4	316
Croatia	131	—	106	2	10	22	271
Kosovo	3	—	1	2	—	17	23
Macedonia	6	—	—	4	—	7	17
Montenegro	5	20	1	4	—	6	37
Serbia (proper)	142	—	—	13	7	5	167
Slovenia	—	—	—	—	—	33	33
Vojvodina	45	—	6	—	7	25	83
Abroad	33	—	14	3	24	6	80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>125<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1,027</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes Albanians (18,000), Germans (28,000), Gypsies (18,000), Hungarians (2,000), Macedonians (6,000), Slovenes (42,000), and others (11,000).  
 SOURCE: Žerjavić (1992), p. 168.

**Figure 36: The war census statistics done by Kočević and Žerjavić estimate the losses on the territory of Yugoslavia. Very little attention was given to Roma losses. A larger table with the overview of the numbers appears later in the text, including statistics that are included as a footnote in the original record copies. The statistics appear within the tale for better statistical overview (courtesy of Philip Cohen 110, 111).**

The following tables give an easier and more detailed overview of war statistics calculated by two scholars in the field, Bogoljub Kočević, a Serb, and Vladimir Žerjavić, a Croat. The tables are taken from Žerjavić’s essay *Losses of Life in Yugoslavia during the World War II*, published in 1989.

2. Losses by nationality (in thousands)					
		Study by			
		Dr. Bogoljub Kočević	Vladimir Žerjavić		
			in country	abroad	total
<b>Yugoslavs</b>	Serbs	487	497	33	530
	Croats	207	178	14	192
	Slovenians	32	36	6	42
	Montenegrins	50	20	-	20
	Muslims	86	100	3	103
	Macedonians	7	6	-	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>869</b>	<b>837</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>893</b>
<b>Other slavs nations</b>	Czechoslovakians	4	1	-	1
	Poles	2	1	-	1

	Russians/Ukrainians	5	5	-	5
	Bulgarians	1	-	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Other nations</b>	Albanians	6	18	-	18
	Turks	3	2	-	2
	Jews	60	33	24	57
	<b>Gypsies</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>18</b>
	Hungarians	5	2	-	2
	Germans	26	28	-	28
	Italians	1	-	-	-
	Romanians	4	-	-	-
	others	1	2	-	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>1.014</b>	<b>947</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1.027</b>

3. Losses by nationality (in thousands)											
Nationality	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Croatia	Macedonia	Montenegro	Slovenia	Serbia				killed abroad	Total
						Total	Serbia	Vojvodina	Kosovo		
<b>Serbs</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>530</b>
Croats	64	106	-	1	-	7	-	6	1	14	192
Slovenians	-	2	-	1	32	1	-	-	1	6	42
Macedonians	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Montenegrins	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Muslims	75	2	4	4	-	15	13	-	2	3	103
Czechoslovakians	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Poles	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Russians/Ukrainians	1	-	-	1	-	3	3	-	-	-	5
Hungarians	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
Germans	1	2	-	-	1	24	1	23	-	-	28
Albanians	-	-	-	4	-	14	-	-	14	-	18
Turks	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	2
Jews	9	10	-	-	-	14	7	7	-	24	57

Gypsies	1	15	-	-	-	2	-	1	1	-	18
others	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1.027</b>

The calculations estimate the number of Gypsy casualties from the low 27,000 to an even lower 18,000. In another statistic, Edmond Paris, a historian in the field of World War II, meets Kocevic's estimation with a figure of 26,000, and attributes "the Gypsy losses for all of Yugoslavia solely to the Croatian puppet state" (Cohen 107). Kovacevic has used the numbers presented as a tool to push blame from Serbia to Croatia. This blame was reversed by Zerjavic to put blame on Serbia and undermine the actual number of deaths caused by the Croatian side. In all that fight, the numbers presented cast more shadows on an already complicated matter! If the numbers on Jasenovac, where we do have some documentation, are so diverse and uncertain, how can one hope to find the truth about camps and prisons, as well as about events that show little or no evidentiary materials and documentations whatsoever? The lack of evidence, however, is not the proof that certain atrocities never took place. It is only a lack of information and a way to deny Gypsies their right:

Wir, die gelernten Zahlenfetischisten, sind sobald wir Genaues über das so zahlreiche Volk der Roma erfahren wollen, auf grobe Schätzungen angewiesen; selbst in Deutschland, einem Land also, in dem bekanntlich alles gezählt wird und auf jeglichem Fachgebiet studierte Erbsenzähler fleißig sind, wissen wir nicht, wie viele Sinti als Angehörige des Roma Volkes bei uns leben. Es gibt Gründe für diese Ungenauigkeit. Ob hierzulande oder in Litauen, in Tschechien und der Slowakei, allerorts in Europa wagen es viele Roma und Sinti nicht, sich kenntlich

zu machen. Ihre Erfahrung weiß von Verletzungen, die ihnen und ihren Familien zugefügt wurden, als sie kenntlich, das heißt registriert waren...Abermals weiß man nicht die genaue Zahl. Waren es fünfhunderttausend ermordete Roma oder, wie der Historiker Eberhard Jäckel meint, „nur“ und allenfalls hundertfünfzigtausend, weshalb man nicht, wie bei der Vernichtung der Juden, von Völkermord sprechen dürfe? Selbst als Tote werden die Roma ausgegrenzt (Grass 72, 73).

Many writers and scholars of Roma descent have spent their lives and energy fighting to bring the statement made by Grass to the forefront of the Holocaust debate and to confront the battle of numbers, which has been the main argument against Gypsies' total annihilation, namely that their number did not come close to the number of Jewish victims. Hancock, a Roma professor himself, has stated:

I do not want to read references to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the national press and learn only that it is a monument to the plight of European Jews, as the New York Times told its readers on December 23, 1993. I want to be able to watch epics such as *Schindler's List* and learn that Gypsies were a central part of the Holocaust, too; or other films, such as *Escape from Sobibor*, a Polish camp where, according to Kommandant Franz Stangl in his memoirs, thousands of Roma and Sinti were murdered, and not hear the word 'Gypsy' except once, and then only as the name of somebody's dog (Churchill 1997).

In the beginnings of the battle for recognition, many of the scholars fought with meager public awareness. But it was “not only *that* the public at large is unaware of the



Gypsy Holocaust, but Gypsies themselves are often ignorant of this aspect of their history. Ours is an oral culture and there is low contact level among the various Gypsy communities. The historians have not really dealt with this part of the Holocaust and it is not part of the education curricula” (Bandy 1997).

Their struggle continues and so far Roma as a race mostly have been denied their rights as victims of the Final Solution:

Determining the percentage or number of Roma who died in the Holocaust...is not easy. Much of the Nazi documentation remains to be analyzed, and many murders were not recorded, since they took place in the fields and forests where Roma were apprehended. There are no accurate figures either for the prewar Roma population in Europe, though the Nazi Party's official census of 1939 estimated it to be about two million, certainly an under-representation. The latest (1997) figure from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Research Institute in Washington puts the number of Roma lives lost by 1945 at "between a half and one and a half million." Since the end of the Second World War, Germany's record regarding the Roma people has been less than exemplary. Nobody was called to testify in behalf of the Roma victims at the Nuremberg Trials, and no war crimes reparations have ever been paid to Roma as a people (Hancock 1997).

How long the debates will persist and if the public recognition will ever be obtained are questions that remain unanswered at this stage. “The fact remains that Gypsies were rounded up, brutalized, interned, deported, used in medical experiments, and liquidated on racial grounds, for belonging to an "inferior" race, according to Nazi ideology” (Bandy 1997). The German government has slowly begun to acknowledge the

plight and the struggle of Roma and Sinti, and has done much in recent years to pay reparation costs to a few of the survivors. The general public will, however, need more time to get used to the fact that the Gypsy race, just as Jews, suffered an immense loss during the Holocaust. The idea might take longer, due to the prejudices and stereotypes many people still hold when the word 'Gypsy' is mentioned. The general public has no sense of the true character, the plight, and the struggle Gypsies as a people have experienced and continue to experience. According to Ian Hancock "how can you feel compassion for a people you don't know? We are an abstraction, to be discussed in our absence and, worse, even in our presence, as though we don't really exist, with no thought for our feelings or our dignity" (2000). This 'abstraction' continues to hold out and to survive, no matter how difficult the road and how thorny the way to equality and recognition. The Holocaust is just another sad chapter in the book full of blank pages, filled with prejudice, aches and tears. But, because Gypsies have been able to survive all that prejudice, we should be able to acknowledge them as a race, persecuted on the racial grounds. The fact that they continue to go on and strive to preserve their customs and traditions, and that they show no bitter feelings and vengeance toward those who attempted to annihilate their race should not be an excuse. Because of their patience and endurance historians should be more eager to grant them their right. The numbers and the terminology are only a distraction from the important conclusion: Gypsies were, like Jews, persecuted and killed on the basis of legal documents, which declared them a racial threat. Until we are willing to grant them the status that rightfully belongs to them, the Great Devouring, prejudice and stereotyping will continue.

## Conclusion

Gypsies have been an active part of European society ever since they came to Europe. Along active membership came hardship, prejudice, and persecution. Though Gypsies tried to live in harmony with local communities, they were labeled as outsiders because of their racial characteristics. Various European countries dealt with the “Gypsy problem” in harsh, brutal, and often inhumane ways. Germany continued this legacy in 1933, and legalized the persecution based on race, which applied to Jews and Gypsies.

Hitler, however, faced a difficulty in addressing the issue of the Gypsy race. His politics of pure race were based on the rules established to portray Aryan race: blue eyes, blond hair, strong men, hardworking women, and happy children. Gypsies, coming from the Punjab area, were the true Aryans, and there was no way around this fact. But, they did not fit the picture of the pure Aryan race. To avoid the conflict and confusion that the terminology would bring, National Socialists labeled Gypsies as anti-socials, criminals, thieves, and undesirables. Many laws against them were enacted with the excuse that they were dangerous and unsafe. Regardless of what reasons were given, the fact remains that the Gypsies were persecuted because of their race. This was evident in Himmler’s statements, and in the laws enacted to persecute even Gypsies who had settled down, and had been a part of the local community. Thus the discrimination and systematic annihilation conducted on Gypsies was the same as the systematic, calculated and cold-blooded annihilation of Jews. The racial laws found usage in all countries under Axis rule. Some countries applied them with great vigor, while others, like Italy and Hungary, used all means to get around these laws and help the persecuted races. The application of

the racial laws leaves many historians of today with the question of whether Gypsies can and should be counted in the Holocaust studies. The general trend acknowledges that many Gypsies died during World War II and feels pity and remorse towards the poor, illiterate crowd, at the same time denying the idea that Gypsies were persecuted on racial grounds. Next to this is another debate. As I have shown in my research, many historians use the difficulty of defining a Rom as an excuse to claim that the persecution of Gypsies in World War II was not a systematic persecution, which led to total annihilation and genocide of a race. I beg to differ on both of these points. A general overview of the history of Gypsies on the European soil shows that Gypsies were persecuted because of their race, not because of their nomadic lifestyle. Testimonies of witnesses in Yugoslavia show the same. Many of the Gypsies who were deported to Jasenovac were sedentary when the war broke out in Yugoslavia. Thus to claim that Gypsies were persecuted and annihilated because they were unsafe or dangerous is a noble way to admit that we do not care that Gypsies were a target of racial genocide. Also, the fact that some governments acted in favor of Gypsies, as in the case of Denmark, still does not erase the fact that the racial laws were there, and that German allies acted on them. Examining the case of Jasenovac clarifies this. There was no pardon. All Gypsies were killed.

It is astonishing to see the debate the issue of the racial persecution of Gypsies has brought along. The war of words, the denial and unwillingness to acknowledge Gypsies as a race and to admit that their suffering and destruction was proportionate to the destruction of Jews only shows how little we have learned from the lessons of the Holocaust.

Another finding in this research is the vastness of the topic as it relates to Yugoslavia in the years 1941 to 1945. It has not been a priority in the Holocaust research to find out what happened because most of the documents and materials have been destroyed. Were it not for the recent conflicts in Yugoslavia, many of the issues that have been weighing on the two regions I researched, Serbia and Croatia, would never have been brought up. Yugoslavian historians spend time to acknowledge Jasenovac, however, its brutality has been only vaguely referred to in the study of the Holocaust. Its existence on the territory of Yugoslavia is seldom addressed. Maybe this is due to the fact that Serbia and Croatia attempted to bury the brutality with the dead of Jasenovac and leave it there in hopes of fostering social fraternity. My goal in presenting the facts of Jasenovac (and I recognize that I have not really begun to depict the brutality which occurred at Jasenovac) was not to stir the painful past. Nor was my desire to point the finger at Serbian or Croatian people. The facts of history do not excuse or accuse either of the regions. The Croatian and Serbian governments during the war years did little to help Gypsies, or Jews. On the other hand, individuals in both regions sacrificed their lives in hopes to help persecuted races. As I researched deeply into the past of the two regions, I realized that both Serbia and Croatia are to be blamed for their government's lack of interest in saving Gypsy and Jewish lives. I did, however, find individuals in both regions worth high praise for their courage in aiding Gypsies with food, shelter and protection.

In presenting Jasenovac, I did want to reveal to all who read how brutal this concentration camp was. I wanted to warn every nation and every person who lulls himself or herself into thinking that only Germans committed atrocities and persecuted races. It could happen anywhere, and the outcome could be even more brutal than the one

we have witnessed watching movies about and from Auschwitz. The fact is that Yugoslavia had concentration camps where Gypsies, Jews, Serbs, and Croats were killed in the most sadistic ways. Why do historians forget to add Jasenovac, when they speak of Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Sobibor or Treblinka? Jasenovac has been only vaguely mentioned partly because of lack of interest, partly because of ignorance, and partly due to a conscious exclusion on the part of historians. It is the time that Jasenovac became an important entry on the list of Holocaust brutality because that is where it belongs.

My goal was not to depict Croatians as animals, and excuse Serbians as victims (I have not addressed other regions in Yugoslavia, because of the magnitude of the research, which needed to be done to depict those regions appropriately. I hope my work on Serbia and Croatia will spark interest and further research about Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro, because their case needs investigation as well, and could not be covered here due to its volume). I hope to have shown that the atrocities were committed on both Serbian and Croatian sides, and in organized groups such as the Ustasha, and the Chetniks. In doing so, my goal was to tear down the stereotypes that still exist in our culture today and to address the question of responsibility toward Gypsies Croatia and Serbia had. Gypsies, who were labeled as the dangerous ones, committed only one “crime”: they were Gypsy. Yet the stereotype of their being dangerous, evil, and criminal still prevails and is shown in the reluctance to allow them a place next to Jews in the Holocaust.

I wanted to share my love for these people. Along with that love I wanted to show that they are human beings who love, feel, and suffer. They have been and still are persecuted and belittled because of their race, not because of who they are.

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