Memory, Heritage and Public History in Central and Eastern Europe

The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina

From Martyrs to Memory Guardians

Nikolina Židek

CEU PRESS

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Memory, cultural heritage and history all too often have been treated as separate concepts.

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To Žuži, my partner in crime.
To my parents, and to baka Desa and dida Drago,
whom I know would have been proud.

Table of Contents

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I end this note with a quote from a poem *Hrvati mi idu na jetra* by the Croatian émigré poet Boris Maruna, whose verses mirror, with remarkable subtlety, the themes explored in my research:

Kao prvo, svi sve znadu.
Drugo, ostavljaju smeće za sobom.
Treće, u stanju su da vam probiju uši
S revolucijom i ženama.
Dim njihovih cigareta puni barove
U trokutu između Münchena
Vancouvera i sidnejskih dokova:

U lijevoj mladi luk
U desnoj komad pečene janjetine
U džepu Katekizam hrvatskih kamikaza.

Dodajmo tome da uvijek nalaze
Ispriku za svoje postupke;
Kao veliki ruski državnici
Uvijek nađu prikladan savjet:
Zašto ne pišeš osjećajne pjesme?
Ti bi trebao biti borbeniji!
Od tebe smo s pravom očekivali više.

Govore Hrvati.

Vi možete zajebavati poeziju,
Ali ne i mene, odgovaram ja.

I to je dovoljno da se uvrijede
-Bilo što je dovoljno da se uvrijede-

Zapale novu cigaretu i
Emigriraju nekuda.

Introduction

Abstract: The introduction identifies a research gap, offers a brief overview of the relevant existing literature, situates the research within existing diaspora and memory studies, and gives an outline of the book.

Keywords: research gap, diaspora, memory studies

"Peronospora" and Diaspora

After I finished my BA in Spanish and Italian language and literature in Croatia, I went to Argentina in 2000 to teach Croatian to the third and fourth generations of Croatian immigrants in the Province of Santa Fe in the towns of Venado Tuerto and Chovet. My students were mostly descendants of Croats who came to the country either before World War I or in the interwar period, fleeing from hunger and a disease that destroyed vineyards on the Dalmatian islands. As the first and second waves came following the economic hardship caused by the diseased vineyards, and a last, third wave came as political émigrés after World War II, the first two are referred to as the "peronospora," and the third as the "diaspora."[1] Many of these peronospora members had either recently realized that they were Croats or would come to my classes to learn if they were from Croatia by bringing letters from relatives they could never read. They still struggled with the term *yugoslavos* when identifying themselves, because their ancestors entered the country with the passport of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and I spent a lot of time explaining the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia. But they were almost all descendants of economic emigrants.

A friend from the same program went with me on a trip to Iguazú Falls at the triple border between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. One night a tall

1 The name "peronospora" alludes to a genus of destructive mildew by the same name. In this case, the actual disease was grape phylloxera, but *Peronospora* is used because it rhymes with "diaspora."

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old man appeared at our hostel and asked, "Ima l'ođe dvije 'Rvatice?" ("Are two Croatian girls here?" in heavy dialect). He was looking for us, to show us around the town and take us to his house for dinner. He spoke perfect Croatian, and he would not take no for an answer. When we came to his garden entrance, three huge German shepherds appeared, barking. Then he said, "Vuk, Vezir, Bosna, sjedi!" ("Wolf, Vizier, Bosnia, sit!") and turned to us, proudly stating, "They answer only orders in Croatian." His house was like a time capsule, full of memorabilia from the World War II Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska—NDH), including a big map of the then Croatian state on his dining room wall and portraits of the NDH leadership above the map, with Poglavnik (NDH and Ustaša leader) Ante Pavelić in the middle, in a golden frame. His memories of that period were still alive, and he was thrilled to share them with us. He also said proudly that he had been the "*stegovni* in *our* army," an NDH officer in charge of army discipline. That was my first contact with a member from the Croatian post-World War II diaspora.

The second was when I went to Buenos Aires for a weekend with a friend of Croatian origin who told me that we would sleep in another Croat's house on the outskirts of the capital. We went dancing and came to the house in the dark, so I did not notice anything strange. In the morning, I woke up first and got out of the room and was greeted by a lady, the mother of our host, in Croatian. Then she invited me for breakfast and, when I finished my coffee in the dining room full of Croatian memorabilia, she invited me to the Sunday Mass. The church was at the ground floor of the house, so we just went downstairs, and I suddenly found myself surrounded by Croatian émigrés warmly greeting me because I was from Croatia. When the Mass started, the first song they sang was Đani Maršan's "Bože, čuvaj Hrvatsku!" ("God, save Croatia!"), a 1990s patriotic song turned into the party anthem of the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica—HDZ). I sang along in awe and disbelief. When I returned to Croatia, I told these anecdotes about my firsthand meeting with a real Ustaša officer and the house with a Croatian church inside so many times. Little did I know that the post-World War II Croatian political emigration to Argentina would become the topic of my decade-long research.

Later, when I came to Argentina in 2009 posted as Croatian diplomat, I was in charge of consular affairs and Croatian emigration, so I had close and regular contact with Croats in Argentina, especially from the diaspora, the political émigré community concentrated in Buenos Aires and its surroundings. During my posting from July 2009 to October 2013, I regularly went to the Sunday Mass at the Croatian Catholic mission in Buenos Aires

and the events they organized, and met all the members of the community, many still of the first generation or the 1.5 generation—those who arrived as children—and listened to their stories. At first, I was startled to hear a different version of history than the one I was taught in school, such as that for them May 8, 1945 was not the day of liberation from fascism, but the occupation or fall of Zagreb, and that "the Allies occupied Europe in 1945," or their insisting on singing the Croatian anthem from NDH times, with the river Drina included among Croatian rivers.[2] It would take another book, and of another sort, just to retell all the anecdotes. I heard so many personal stories of exile and struggle for a normal life in the new country.

What was common to all the diaspora members was that the memory of post-World War II was very alive and it was constantly retold by the members of the first, second, and third generations as if it happened yesterday, and as if it occurred to them personally. They were all more than willing to share "their" story and the pride of being the "true Croats" who preserved the "Croatness," the language, and traditions for more than seven decades. Every now and then some researchers would come from Croatia to observe the diaspora as some kind of exotic case study. That led one of the members of the community to jokingly conclude that they were "Croatian Hottentots," meaning that they periodically became the center of interest of Croatian anthropologists who came to "measure their heads," the same as German or other Western European scholars did with African tribes.

It was not until I left the diplomatic service that I started to study Croatian political émigrés in Argentina as a community, but my previous experience and close contact with them turned out to be very useful for my research, because I had already grasped the multilayered-ness and complexity of the community and its memory. My earlier personal contact with them was a two-way process: on the one hand, I already had a clear picture of the community and its narratives and knew all its relevant members and events, while I was also a familiar face to them, making it much easier to get interviews or access to information or archives. Ever since I left the Croatian diplomatic service in 2014, I have dedicated my research to the topic of Croatian émigrés after World War II, especially in Argentina. The academic research has lasted for ten years and counting, but my contacts

2 In 1942, the river Drina was part of the NDH because it contained Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose border with Serbia is marked by the river Drina. "This addition was later abandoned in line with the shift of borders that took place." Christopher Kelen and Aleksandar Pavković, "Of Love and National Borders: The Croatian Anthem 'Our Beautiful Homeland,'" *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 2 (2012): 247–66, 262.

with both the Croatian peronospora and diaspora have lasted for more than two decades and were extremely useful for this monograph. And no, I did not measure anyone's head. I dug in the archives instead.

The "Underground Memory" of the Croatian Post-World War II Diaspora in Argentina

After the defeat in World War II, the army of the Nazi-aligned quisling NDH, together with other defeated armies from the territory of Yugoslavia and thousands of civilians,[3] fled the country and attempted to surrender to the British Army and Yugoslav Partisans in Bleiburg, Austria, on May 15, 1945.[4] However, they were partly captured before reaching Austria, or repatriated back from Bleiburg to Yugoslavia by the Partisans (the winning side) and then executed en masse or transferred to labor camps. The surrender, the killings, and the aftermath are commonly referred to as "Bleiburg."

Most of those who escaped from Yugoslavia safely were first retained at the Western allies' displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy, and eventually found their haven abroad. A smaller part used the (in)famous ratlines to flee from Europe. When we talk about the fate of the Croatian post-World War II political émigrés, Argentina inevitably comes to mind as one of their main destinations. The immigration policy of the first Perón government (1946–55) favored Catholic and anti-Communist immigrants who complied with ethnic, economic, religious, and ideological standards that allowed them to easily assimilate into society and serve the increasing industrialization of the country.[5] It is estimated that

3 Defeated armies included units of the Third Reich, the Slovene Home Guard, and members of various Serbian and Montenegrin Chetnik units. Martina Grahek Ravančić, "The Historiography of Bleiburg and the Death Marches Since Croatian Independence," *Croatian Political Science Review* 55, no. 2 (2018): 133–44, 134.

4 There is a variety of historiographical sources on the Bleiburg postwar killings, mostly written by local authors. Pal Kolstø, "Bleiburg: The Creation of a National Martyrology," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 7 (2010): 1153–74, offers a short outline on the historical background in English. Grahek Ravančić, "The Historiography of Bleiburg," gives an overview of the existing historiography of Bleiburg and divides it into three groups: the émigré literature; the literature written in the former Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1990, offering perspectives from the winning side; and the literature published in the last twenty-seven years, since Croatian independence (143). Grahek Ravančić observes that the last group has not contributed to any new analytical, theoretical, or documentary revelations, with some exceptions indicating that things are slowly moving in a positive direction.

5 Leonardo Senkman, "Etnicidad e inmigración durante el primer peronismo," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y El Caribe* 3, no. 2 (1992): 5–38.

approximately seventeen thousand Croats entered Argentina between 1946 and 1951, but ten thousand of these—among them the NDH political and military leadership—remained in the country, while the other seven thousand moved elsewhere in the Americas.[6]

The Croatian diaspora after World War II in Argentina developed a specific identity due to the historic context of its exile: the military defeat, the loss of an independent state, the postwar killings, and forced migration represented a trauma that served for their constitution as a community of exiles and self-perceived victims. It also served as a foundational myth which allowed them to erase the memory of the prior events, that is, the role and the atrocities (extermination camps and mass killings) of the NDH during World War II, but also as a unifying force of identity across generations.[7]

Since the émigrés were labeled as "an enemy of the people" by post-1945 socialist Yugoslavia, they understood it as their mission to preserve their memory and reveal the hidden truth (meaning their victimhood) behind the official propaganda. They developed an "underground memory," waiting to emerge once the dream of independence of their country and their comeback could come true.[8] The hope of return also strengthened their commitment with political activity aimed toward changing their situation until the conditions were created for their homecoming.[9] This dream of returning, mixed with trauma as a mark of singularity based on a sense of privilege due to belonging to an unfavored (defeated and exiled) group,[10] enabled the diaspora community to distinguish itself not only from other Croatian immigrants in Argentina who came to the country earlier as economic immigrants, but also towards Argentinian society and their country of origin.

6 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990* (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1991). Sinovčić himself also makes an uneducated estimate that the real number is five thousand.

7 There are plenty of historiographical sources on the Croatian Nazi puppet state, mostly written by local authors. *The Independent State of Croatia 1941–45* (London and New York: Routledge 2020), edited by Sabrina P. Ramet, is the first volume in English to closely explore the structure, ideology, and political history of the Ustaša group during interwar and World War II Yugoslavia. Another useful source in English that covers the full story of the Ustaša from its historic roots to its downfall is Pino Adriano and Giorgio Cingolani, *Nationalism and Terror: Ante Pavelić and Ustasha Terrorism from Fascism to the Cold War* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018).

8 Michael Pollak, *Memoria, olvido, silencio, La producción social de identidades frente a situaciones límite* (La Plata: Ediciones Al Margen, 2006).

9 Dora Schwarsztein, *Entre Franco y Perón. Memoria e identidad del exilio republicano español en Argentina* (Barcelona: Crítica Contrastes, 2001), xvi.

10 Tsvetan Todorov, *Los abusos de la memoria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2000), 54.

The uprooting from their territory of origin—inherent to all diaspora communities—has been elaborated among émigrés and their descendants through a collective memory, built and transmitted from one generation to another through an active political and community life, the family, the Croatian Catholic center, and school, focusing primarily on victimhood and nationalist—but also anti-Communist and anti-Yugoslav—identity. From 1945 to 1990, Croatian political émigrés preserved a narrative of the NDH as a fulfillment of a thousand-years old yearning for Croatia's independence, as they pushed for the destruction of socialist Yugoslavia and the recreation of an independent Croatian state. Due to the context of Western politics during the Cold War, and the local anti-Communist alliances, the politically active portion of the community managed to reconfigure themselves as anti-Communists and victims of Communism and Yugoslavia, and eventually as democrats.

When the dream of Croatian independence was achieved, most of the Croatian diaspora political parties in Argentina ceased with their political activities abroad and found resonance in the homeland with their political ideas. It was a period when many finally went to Croatia—the old generation either to visit or to return and die, and the second and third generations to settle in the homeland, or even to join the war of independence as volunteers. Moreover, it was a moment when the diaspora community thought that their underground memory, which they kept for so long, would finally gain the status it deserved. However, after the war broke out, they understood that this was not a priority, and they perceived the Homeland War, as the 1991–95 war is called in Croatia, as a continuation of their fight in World War II for Croatian independence.

By the beginning of the 2000s, the members of the first generation who had come to Argentina as adults began perishing and this gave way to a definitive change of generations, with the generation of the "post-memory"[11] as new "memory entrepreneurs."[12] This also overlapped with the new generation's disappointment with the lack of the official acknowledgment of their "underground memory" of Bleiburg postwar killings in Croatia and their overall suffering, and strengthened their self-perceived identity as true Croats and exacerbated the new us vs. them dichotomy—between the Croats in the diaspora and the Croats in independent Croatia. The post-memory generation re-signified itself, taking ownership of the memory

11 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

12 Elisabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

to reinforce their identity and the determination to keep commemorating the old NDH dates. They also started using new tools, such as social media, to connect with like-minded Croats in the homeland and in the diaspora, thus becoming "planetary Croats" by being "instantly connected to events in every part of the world. Therefore, no matter where [they] are, [they] can contribute to the development of Croatian Nation that [they] form part of."[13] This monograph will analyze the history and tools of intergenerational transmission of memory among the Croatian post-World War II diaspora in Argentina, along with their children and grandchildren who preserved their memory until today to reinforce a feeling of belonging to a community by sharing an identity rooted in traumatic history.

A Brief Overview of the Relevant Existing Literature

The Croatian post-World War II political émigré community is an under-researched field, especially when it comes to Latin America, and specifically Argentina. We can divide the literature produced during the Yugoslav era into two opposite or opposing clusters. On the one hand there is the literature produced in socialist Yugoslavia. The titles of these books are understandably and inevitably in line with the official politics towards the "anti-Yugoslav/enemy/fascist emigration" (*antijjugoslovenska/neprijateljska/fašistička emigracija*).[14] On the other hand, the literature coming from diaspora was (and still is) biased in the opposite direction: except for the initial writings of the members of the first generation in the diaspora journals—as will be seen in this book—the later works, especially by subsequent generations, show almost a total lack of self-criticism towards the émigré community's actions and motives, or the crimes of the Ustaša regime during World War II. Thus, their work is full of romanticized or victimizing narratives. This type of literature written by the Croatian political émigrés in Argentina will be used in the corpus of this book as both historiographic and testimonial material.

13 Jorge Jure Dragicevic, second generation, speech at the celebration of April 10 in 2015, Facebook, accessed September 3, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/unioncroata2017/posts/787887348051410.
14 Milo Bošković, *Antijugoslovenska fašistička emigracija* (Anti-Yugoslav fascist emigration) (Belgrade: Sloboda, 1980); Milo Bošković, *Šesta kolona: nastanak, organizacija i delovanje antijugoslovenske fašističke emigracije* (The sixth column: Creation, organization, and activities of anti-Yugoslav fascist emigration) (Zagreb: Birotehnika, 1985); Sreten Kovačević, *Hronologija antijugoslovenskog terorizma 1960–1980* (A chronology of anti-Yugoslav terrorism 1960–80) (Belgrade: ISRO-Privredno finansijski vodič, 1981); Milenko Doder, *Jugoslavenska neprijateljska emigracija* (Yugoslav enemy emigration) (Zagreb: Centar za informacije i publicitet, 1989).

As far as the more recent, post-Yugoslav literature on the topic is concerned, a significant portion of studies still comes from the diaspora community itself or their descendants, and they focus on the émigré contribution to the destruction of Yugoslavia and "regaining" the independence of Croatia, portraying themselves as patriots and victims of Communism without any critical stance towards even radical groups that used violent methods.[15] Also, they study major diaspora centers in the West, such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and West Germany.[16] Most of the works from this group have been published as conference proceedings of the Croatian Emigrant Congress organized every two years since 2014 by the Center for Research of Croatian Emigration, an institution founded with the aim "to promote, develop, support and improve relations between Croats in the homeland and in emigration."[17] As Axboe Nielsen rightly says, "It is particularly unfortunate that a number of prominent publicists in Slovenia and Croatia on émigré issues have also been key participants in the very troubling wave of right-wing revisionism of that regime in Croatia in recent years. Their rehabilitation of the Ustaša quisling state and their denial of its fascist and systematically criminal nature ultimately also reflect negatively on the ability of these authors to come to terms with the more problematic and malignant aspects of the activities of nationalist émigrés in the period from 1945 to 1991."[18] Despite their lack of criticism, inherent subjectivities, and even historical revisionism, these works can be considered valuable sources of information on persons and organizations active during the Cold War, duly taken with a grain of salt.

Lately, in Croatia, less biased and more nuanced studies have appeared, especially in by the Institute for Migrations and Ethnic Studies (Institut za migracije i narodnosti—IMIN). The IMIN researchers Mesarić Žabčić and Perić Kaselj published a short paper comparing the national identity of Croatian migrant communities in Argentina and New South Wales, Australia, making a distinction between the different waves and identification (Yugoslav vs. Croats), and giving an overview of associations and parties founded, as well as journals published by the Croatian political émigré community in both countries, without going in depth, concluding that the

15 To exemplify: Vlado Šakić et al., eds., *Budućnost iseljene Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 1998); Jasna Čapo et al., eds., *Didov san: transgranična iskustva hrvatskih iseljenika* (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Institut za društvene znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2014); Ivan Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005).

16 Marin Sopta, *Hrvati u Kanadi: oblikovanje hrvatske zajednice od 1945. do 1995* (Zagreb: Institut za društvene znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2012).

17 Croatian Emigration Congress website, https://www.centar-za-iseljenistvo.hr/hik.

18 Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations: The History and Legacy of Tito's Campaign Against the Emigrés* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 5.

pre-World War II emigrants mostly participated in Yugoslav associations, while "political emigrants established opposite associations with the national names and anti-communist orientation."[19] The IMIN conference proceedings, *Social and Historical Context of the Political Activities in Emigration: Parties, Organizations, Movements*,[20] are especially relevant for this book, with works on Croatian political emigration, its structures, goals, and successes,[21] parties' programs,[22] and the first contacts by Franjo Tuđman—later first Croatian president—with the Croatian émigré community.[23] Žižić's paper from their previous conference, on the reactions of Croatian diaspora intellectuals to Tuđman's contacts with the diaspora, is also important.[24]

Scholarship published abroad and in English includes contributions by Ragazzi,[25] Hockenos,[26] Đurić,[27] Winland,[28] Brkanić,[29] and Skrbiš,[30] who

19 Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić and Marina Perić Kaselj, "National Identity of Croatian Emigrants in Overseas Countries: Examples (Comparison) of Croatian Migrant Communities in Argentina and Australia (New South Wales)," *Dve domovini* 30 (2009): 175–91, 188.

20 Marina Perić Kaselj, ed., *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti* (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020).

21 Jakov Žižić, "Hrvatska politička emigracija: pojam, strukture, ciljevi i uspjesi," in *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020), 13–21.

22 Ante Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa hrvatskih političkih stranaka i organizacija nakon Drugog svjetskog rata," in *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020), 72–86.

23 Ivan Čizmić, "Prvo razdoblje suradnje Franje Tuđmana s hrvatskim iseljenicima," in *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020), 287–302, 297.

24 Jakov Žižić, "'Hrvat je, koji je otvorio oči': Emigrantski intelektualci i političari o Franji Tuđmanu na stranicama časopisa Hrvatska revija," in *Međunarodni znanstveni skup Dijasporski i nacionalno manjinski identiteti: migracije, kultura, granice države*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj and Filip Škiljan (Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti, 2018), 277–302.

25 Francesco Ragazzi, "The Invention of the Croatian Diaspora: Unpacking the Politics of 'Diaspora' During the War in Yugoslavia," *Global Migration and Transnational Politics, Working Paper* 10 (2009).

26 Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

27 Ivana Đurić, "The Croatian Diaspora in North America: Identity, Ethnic Solidarity, and the Formation of a 'Transnational National Community,'" *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 113–30.

28 Daphne N. Winland, *We Are Now a Nation: Croats Between 'Home' and 'Homeland'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

29 Anita Brkanić, "The Diaspora Dilemma: Croatian-American Civil Society Institutions and Their Political Role in the Democratisation of the Homeland," in *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans*, eds. Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2013), 135–54.

30 Zlatko Skrbiš, "The Mobilized Croatian Diaspora: Its Role in Homeland Politics and War," in *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?*, ed. Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007), 218–38.

focuses on long-distance nationalism and the diaspora engagement in Croatian politics in the 1990s—including the independence, the war, and the postwar period. Hockenos and Winland focus on Canadian Croats, Đurić, Ragazzi, and Brkanić study Croats in the USA, Kolar-Panov[31] and Skrbiš[32] cover Australian Croats, and Povrzanović Frykman studies the Croatian diaspora in Sweden.[33] Robionek gives a global overview of Croatian political refugees in the West.[34] Colic-Peisker analyzes patterns of integration of two waves of Croatian immigrants in Western Australia: rural Dalmatians who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, and urban professionals who followed in the 1980s and 1990s.[35] And Ragazzi offers a scholarly contribution on Croatian diaspora politics in international relations.[36]

The violent portion of the Croatian diaspora that engage in separatism and terrorism is mostly under-researched, with a few studies by Clissold,[37] and Hockenos, and case studies on the radicalization of the Croatian diaspora community in Western Germany.[38] In a transnational study on the Croatian diaspora's terrorist activities in Western Germany, Australia, and the US, Tokić gives an overview of the evolution of different émigré groups and their ideology, where he also covers the Ustaša leader Ante Pavelić and his political activity in Argentina and interactions with other significant Croatian émigré centers around the world.[39] Also, Nielsen published a book on political assassinations of émigrés by the Yugoslav intelligence services

31 Dona Kolar-Panov, "Video and the Diasporic Imagination of Selfhood: A Case Study of the Croatians in Australia," *Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (1996): 288–314.

32 Zlatko Skrbiš, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities* (London: Routledge, 2017).

33 Maja Povrzanović Frykman, "Homeland Lost and Gained: Croatian Diaspora and Refugees in Sweden," in *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*, ed. Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (London: Routledge, 2002), 118–37.

34 Bernd Robionek, *Croatian Political Refugees and the Western Allies: A Documented Survey from the Second World War to the Year 1948* (Berlin: Osteuropa-Zentrum Berlin [OEZB-Verlag], 2009).

35 Val Colic-Peisker, *Migration, Class, and Transnational Identities: Croatians in Australia and America* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

36 Francesco Ragazzi, *Governing Diasporas in International Relations: The Transnational Politics of Croatia and Former Yugoslavia* (London: Routledge, 2017).

37 Stephen Clissold, "Croat Separatism: Nationalism, Dissidence, and Terrorism," *Conflict Studies* 103 (1979): 3–21.

38 Mate Nikola Tokić, "The End of 'Historical-Ideological Bedazzlement': Cold War Politics and Émigré Croatian Separatist Violence, 1950–1980," *Social Science History* 36, no. 3 (2012): 421–45; Christopher A. Molnar, *Memory, Politics, and Yugoslav Migrations to Postwar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

39 Mate Nikola Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism During the Cold War* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020).

during the Cold War.[40] In fact, the two books by Tokić and Nielsen should be read in combination with this book to get the complete picture on the global Croatian political émigré network and the activities of Yugoslavia to counteract the violent portion of the Croatian diaspora.

When it comes to research conducted in and on Argentina, there are relevant works by local scholars treating the topic of the arrival of Nazis and fascists in Argentina after the end of World War II. The most important is the three-volume report of the Commission for the Clarification of Nazi Activities in Argentina (CEANA), created in May 1997 by President Carlos Saúl Menem,[41] and the two-volume report *Proyecto Testimonio* (Testimony project) by the DAIA, an umbrella institution of the Argentine Jewish community, published in 1998.[42] Senkman gives a thorough analysis of the immigration policies of the first Perón government and analyzes the massive entry of Croats into the country.[43] Devoto analyzes the "Italian route," the institutional structures and individuals involved in the transfer of refugees, fugitives, and war criminals.[44] He pays special attention to the transit role of the Italian territory in the emigration of other nations, and the role of both the Vatican and the Italian Republic in this complex network. Meding also touches upon Croatians who entered the country through the so-called ratlines, the clandestine routes of Nazi war criminals fleeing Europe, in his PhD turned into a book focused on German and Austrian immigration to Argentina.[45] There are two other, journalistic pieces on the same topic, one by Uki Goñi, the only book that gained international interest because it was published in English.[46] The book uses sources from the Argentinian migration office and the US intelligence archives, and contributes to the

40 Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations*.

41 *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de las Actividades Nazis en la Argentina—CEANA, Informes de avance* (*Vol. I–III*) (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1998); *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de las Actividades Nazis en la Argentina—CEANA, Informe final* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1999).

42 *Proyecto testimonio. Revelaciones de los archivos argentinos sobre política oficial en la era nazi-fascista*, ed. Beatriz Gurevich. DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales. Vol. 1.; *Proyecto testimonio: Respuestas del Estado Argentino ante los pedidos de extradición de criminales de guerra y reos del delito contra la humanidad bajo el Tercer Reich*, ed. Warzawski, Paul. DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales. Vol. 2. (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1998).

43 Senkman, "Etnicidad y migración."

44 Fernando Devoto, "Inmigrantes, refugiados y criminales en la 'vía italiana' hacia la Argentina en la segunda posguerra," *Ciclos en la historia, economía y sociedad* 19, no. 1 (2000): 151–75.

45 Holger Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempos de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1999).

46 Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* (London: Granta Books, 2002).

field with interesting data—although it contains some factual errors, at least with the Croatian group that came through the ratlines. Another journalistic book was written by Ignacio Montes de Oca, *Ustashas: Perón's Nazi Army and the Vatican*.[47] As the title suggests, it offers a sensationalist and conspiratorial narrative, and contains a series of unchecked information and sources, but it is the only one that tries to investigate what happened with the members of the Ustaša after they settled in the country. Academic studies that have touched upon Croatian émigré participation in the context of anti-Communist alliances or local armed groups in 1950s to 1970s include Bohoslavsky and Iglesias Caramés,[48] Broquetas[49], Bohoslavsky et al.[50], Burke[51], and Furman.[52]

There is also a series of local works on the Croats in Argentina from the anthropological standpoint, such as the undergraduate thesis by Rosan, which researches the issue of identity in different waves of Croatian immigration to Argentina, combining secondary sources in Spanish and interviews with the members of the Croatian diaspora in Buenos Aires.[53] In their conference paper, Misetich and Dujovne compare practices and memories of the Jewish and Croatian diasporas in Argentina, give a short overview of the constitution and history of each community, and conclude that "they overlap in the commemoration of two historical facts: on the one hand, the transformation of an idealized mythical homeland into a sovereign and independent State, which makes the return and the constitution of the state into a political project; on the other they commemorate tragedies as a part of history and their own definition of national identity."[54] Solian carried out

47 Ignacio Montes de Oca, *Ustashas: el ejército nazi de Perón y el Vaticano* (Ustashas: Perón's Nazi army and the Vatican) (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2000).

48 Ernesto Bohoslavsky and Mariana Inés Iglesias Caramés, "Las guerras frías del Cono Sur: Argentina, Brasil, Chile y Uruguay (1945–1952)," *OPSIS* 14 (2014): 113–33.

49 Magdalena Broquetas, "Los frentes del anticomunismo. Las derechas en el Uruguay de los tempranos sesenta," *Contemporánea. Historia y problemas del siglo* XX, no. 3 (2012): 11–29.

50 Ernesto Bohoslavsky et al., "Juventudes conservadoras en los años sesenta en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay," in *El pensamiento conservador y derechista en América Latina, España y Portugal, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Fabio Kolar and Ulrich Mücke (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2019), 289–312.

51 Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (Chapell Hill: UNC Press Books, 2018).

52 Rubén Furman, *Puños y pistolas: La extraña historia de la Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2014).

53 Vesna Ana Rosan, "Prácticas diaspóricas: el caso de la comunidad croata en Buenos Aires" (undergraduate thesis, University of Buenos Aires, 2002).

54 Laura Misetich and Alejandro Dujovne, "Entre Zagreb y Jerusalem. Prácticas y Memorias de la Diáspora," in *Escenarios y Nuevas Construcciones Identitarias en América Latina*, ed. María

an anthropological study of the Croats of the Province of Santa Fe and their self-identification as Yugoslavs or Croats depending on the historical context of their immigration or of their ancestors.[55] She also carried out interviews with the members of the community in 1999 and 2000, mostly coming from the third and fourth generations. Gadze and Rajković-Iveta carried out the interviews with the returned Croats from Argentina to Croatia in 2011 and 2012 who emigrated to the country of their ancestors after 1991.[56] The paper makes a distinction between different generations and observes a two-way and somewhat paradoxical process: while their ancestors tried to preserve the Croatian identity in Argentina, those who migrate to Croatia, although for different reasons, do the same—they attempt to preserve the Spanish language and some traditions and food, and gather with other Latin American immigrants. In a similar line, Rajković-Iveta published a paper researching the motivation of Croats and their descendants in Argentina to return to Croatia after the country became independent in the 1990s, as well as their impressions and experiences once they moved to Croatia.[57] Gadze and Rajković-Iveta also published an ethnographic conference paper on the importance of traditional cuisine among Croats in Argentina as a form of nostalgia for home and an expression of ethnic and cultural identity.[58] Molek et al. discuss the topic of representations of memories through art using an interdisciplinary approach that connects contributions from the fields of anthropology and art history to the research problems of art and creative processes, applying these to the work of the Croatian painter Zdravko Dučmelić in Argentina as a case study.[59] All these works usually give a brief history of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina, using mostly sources

Susana Bonetto et al. (Córdoba: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2004), 273–93

55 Cristina Solian, *Entre yugoslavos y croatas. Migración, voces e identidades en Rosario y localidades de la pampa húmeda* (Rosario: Laborde Editor, 2016).

56 Paula Gadze and Marijeta Rajković-Iveta, "Los croatas de Argentina en Croacia," in *Etnicidad y migraciones en Argentina*, ed. Juan Carlos Radovich (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Argentina de Antropología, 2016), 197–224.

57 Marijeta Rajković-Iveta, "Čuo si da je Hrvatska kao raj! Između mašte i stvarnog života, Hrvati iz Argentine u Zagrebu," in *Didov san: transgranična iskustva hrvatskih iseljenika*, ed. Jasna Čapo et al. (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2014), 195–220.

58 Paula Gadze and Marijeta Rajković-Iveta, "Okusi i mirisi Hrvatske u Argentini," in *Hrvatski iseljenički zbornik* 7, ed. Vesna Kukavica (Zagreb: Croatian Heritage Foundation, 2015), 151–70.

59 Nadia Molek et al., "Representations of Memories Through Art: The Artistic Work of Zdravko Dučmelić in Argentina, *Dve domovini* 46 (2017): 57–70.

coming from the diaspora itself,[60] without a critical assessment or in-depth analysis but focusing more on the anthropological perspective of identity.

In contrast, Simić published a book in Serbian Cyrillic on the relations between Perón's Argentina and Tito's Yugoslavia, selectively drawing from the local sources, presenting a biased view of the Croatian émigrés in Argentina (indiscriminately labeling the whole group as Ustaša) and a much more positive view on the Serbian anti-Communist and Četnik émigrés from the same period.[61] I researched the same archives (the diplomatic archive of the Serbian ministry of foreign affairs – embassy of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Buenos Aires), but also contrasted them with archives from Croatia, Croatian émigrés, and Argentinian institutional archives.

Slovenian emigrants and political émigrés to Argentina are far more thoroughly researched. In that sense, Molek is a particularly interesting author who studied the Slovenian immigrants in Argentina mostly from an anthropological perspective.[62] Other interesting authors who studied Slovenian political émigrés to Argentina are Corsellis,[63] Repič,[64] and Žigon.[65]

Thus, if we exclude the unavoidably biased works authored by members of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina, such as those by Rojnica,[66] Lukač de Stier,[67] Sinovčić,[68] and Katalinić,[69] which will be used as a part of my

60 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*; Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2 vols. (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1983); Carmen Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Krivodol Press, 2004).

61 Bojan Simić, *Jugoslavija i Argentina (1946–1955.)* Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2021.

62 Nadia Molek, *Biti Slovenec v Argentini: kompleksnost identitetnih procesov argentinskih Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2019).

63 John Corsellis, "The Slovene Political Emigration 1945–50," *Dve domovini/Two homelands* 8 (1997): 131–59.

64 Jaka Repič, *"Po sledovih korenin": Transnacionalne migracije med Argentino in Evropo* (Ljubljana: Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo, Filozofska fakulteta, Župančičeva knjižnica, 2006); Jaka Repič, "Ambivalent Identities Emerging in Transnational Migrations Between Argentina and Slovenia," *Dve domovini/Two Homelands* 31 (2010): 121–34; Jaka Repič, "Tracing Roots: Slovenian Diaspora in Argentina and Return Mobilites," *Moving Places: Relations, Return, and Belonging* (2016): 85–104.

65 Zvone Žigon, "Funkcionalni bilingvizem in Slovenci v Argentini in Urugvaju," *Dve domovini/Two Homelands* 7 (1996): 71–95; Zvone Žigon, "Slovenska politična emigracija v Argentini," *Dve domovini/Two Homelands* 13 (2001): 111–32.

66 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*.

67 Maja Lukač de Stier, "Aportes de la colectividad croata a la República Argentina," *Studia Croatica* 102 (1986), http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/102/102.htm#_Toc268598781.

68 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*.

69 Kazimir Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede: Povijest hrvatske političke emigracije 1945–1990*, 3 vols. (Zagreb: Naklada Trpimir, 2017).

research corpus, there is practically a vacuum of research on the history and memory of the Croatian political émigré community from their arrival in the mid-1940s until today. There are also some self-published booklets on the history of the Croatian émigré community published by the members of the second and third generations without academic rigor, that rather fit into the category of memory and testimony than historiography, which will be useful for analyzing the reconfiguration of narrative through generations.[70] I am the only one to systematically study the community, its commemorative practices, and its intergenerational transmission of memory, with the results of my research already published in several articles and chapters, as well as unpublished conference papers and presentations, that will form part of this book.[71]

Several Croatian scholars have studied how Tuđman's 1990s national project of an all-Croat reconciliation between the descendants of the Croatian fascists and antifascists, "flirting with fascism,"[72] backfired and the "Ustaša-nostalgia" discourse spilled over into the Republic of Croatia,[73] having as a consequence historical revisionism and *neoustaštvo* (neo-Ustaša sentiment).[74] But they do not observe the preservation of the narrative in the diaspora and the necessary narrative and political reconfigurations that made this spillover in the 1990s and its revival in the 2010s possible. Furthermore, my colleagues who studied the violent activities of Croatian political émigré communities worldwide,[75] or the reaction of the Yugoslav secret services against them,[76] have used the archives but without personal contact with the émigré communities, while I applied a memory studies

70 Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina*; Cristian Sprljan, "Historia de la inmigración croata en Córdoba," *Studia croatica* 44, no. 146 (2004).

71 Nikolina Židek, "Homeland Celebrations Far Away from Home: The Case of the Croatian Diaspora in Argentina," in *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities* (London: Routledge, 2019), 211–24; Nikolina Židek, "A Day of Unfinished Mourning: Historicizing Commemorative Practices of Bleiburg among the Croatian Diaspora in Argentina," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 6 (2020): 1081–96; Nikolina Židek, "'Nobody Asked Me how I Felt.' Childhood Memories of Exile Among the Croatian Post-World War Two Diaspora in Argentina," *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1–18.

72 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Flirting with Fascism: The Ustaša legacy and Croatian Politics in the 1990s," in *The Shared History and the Second World War and National Question in Ex-Yugoslavia* (Novi Sad: CHDR, 2008).

73 Stevo Đurašković, "National Identity-Building and the 'Ustaša-Nostalgia' in Croatia: The Past That Will Not Pass," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 5 (2016): 772–88.

74 Ivo Goldstein, *Povijesni revizionizam i neoustaštvo. Hrvatska 1989–2022* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2023).

75 Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism*.

76 Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations*.

perspective and carried out interviews which enrich this book and the research field. Their research ends either in the 1980s or early 1990s, but they do not analyze what happened when Croatia became independent and the ongoing influence of the diaspora in modern Croatia. This is one of the contributions of this book.

This book is the first exhaustive scholarly longitudinal study which historicizes the development of the Croatian political émigré community in Argentina covering eight decades of its existence, from the mid-1940s until today, and analyzes multiple elements representing the pillars of the community that sustain its memory and history. It is based on archival documents stemming from around eighteen archives from six countries (Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Uruguay, Italy, and Argentina), using materials in six languages (Croatian, Slovenian, Serbian, Italian, Spanish, and English) and contrasting different sources on the same topic—from the Croatian émigré community in Argentina, from socialist Yugoslavia, and from the host country, Argentina. The documentary sources are further complemented with semi-structured interviews and testimonies of the different generations of Croatian diaspora members in Argentina.

Situating Research Within Existing Diaspora and Memory Studies

The research is carried out from the memory studies perspective; that is, the focus will be on the intergenerational transmission of memory in the Croatian diaspora community as a tool of identity preservation. To preserve its identity, the Croatian diaspora community had to maintain a collective memory, defined by Jan Assmann as "the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level."[77] Halbwachs introduced the concept of collective memory as a social construct shared among the members of a certain group in a delimited space and time,[78] insisting that, "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember."[79]

77 Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll et al. (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 109–18, 109.

78 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 84.

79 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 48.

Assmann breaks Halbwachs's concept of collective memory into communicative and cultural memory. Cultural memory "is shared by a number of people" and it "conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity."[80] It is institutionalized, and it seeks the support of external symbols, forms, and institutions of preservation and reembodiment to be transferred from one generation to another. The other, communicative memory lacks material or formal symbolization and relies on interaction and oral transmission. Welzer et al. suggest a subcategory to Assmann's communicative memory called family memory, "whose criteria of truth are regulated on the bases of bonds of loyalty in a group or a felling of 'us' (*wir-gruppe*)."[81] Family memory also tends to be inconsistent and it "is not a monolithic, stable entity, but an ongoing process shaped by the multidimensional *cadres sociaux* of family members. This produces a variety of 'viewpoints' on mnemonic contents and meanings which, depending on the particular family structure, can lead to a continual renegotiation of the past."[82]

In this line, it is important to analyze "the way that we take up and synthesize firsthand and secondhand experience in developing self-narratives, how collective frames of memory are adopted and applied in everyday remembering processes, and how we make sense of and operationalize institutionalized and objectivized memory."[83] Welzer refers to this secondhand experience as the re-narration of stories through generations, referring to stories that are remembered and re-narrated by every single member of a family differently, and especially the stories that are re-narrated by members of the family from different generations on their own. The same applies in "communicative situations concerning stories in which the historical events converge with familial biographical events, where there is inevitably a personal involvement related to the identity of the narrator and the re-narrator of the story."[84] The main difference between communicative and cultural memory is in the level of institutionalization, materiality, and structure of memory transmission in the community, where cultural

80 Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 110.

81 Harald Welzer et al., *Mi abuelo no era nazi: El nacionalsocialismo y el Holocausto en la memoria familiar* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Prometeo Libros, 2012), 24 (all the translations from Spanish into English are by the author of this book, unless otherwise stated).

82 Astrid Erll, "Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 42, no. 3 (2011): 306.

83 Michel Pickering and Emili Keightley, "Communities of Memory and the Problem of Transmission," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2013): 119.

84 Harald Welzer, "Re-Narrations: How Pasts Change in Conversational Remembering," *Memory Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 5–17, 7.

memories always rely on specialized memory carriers. Jelin calls these "memory entrepreneurs," those who "seek social recognition and political legitimacy of *one* (their own) interpretation of the narrative of the past" and are "engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise."[85]

Regarding the uses of memory, I draw on Todorov's differentiation. On one hand, the literal or self-referential use of memory is concentrated on remembering traumatic experience and makes no links with other similar experiences but extends the initial trauma of a person or a group to the present. On the other hand, the exemplary use of memory aspires to seek a more general meaning and represents a lesson and a guide for action in the present and in the future.[86] Assmann's cultural memory relies on what Hobsbawm calls "invented tradition," a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.[87] In the process of identifying the main features of the "invented tradition" over time, it is necessary to "historicize memory," to apply the historical study of memory that can be defined as "the selection and emphasis of certain dimensions and aspects of the past that different actors revive and privilege, and of the changing emotional and affective interpretations that this implies,"[88] while also analyzing "the transformations and changes in actors that remember and forget at any moment or period in their senses and in the cultural and political climates where commemorative practices are carried out."[89]

In the transmission of memory, and for this book, it is essential to define generations. According to Mannheim, generations are constituted by a group of individuals of the same historical and cultural region within a social whole determined or delimited by space and time and formed by common experience, which then turns into collective behavior and attitudes.[90] Mannheim also describes how models of social remembering and past experience are incorporated in the present, either as consciously recognized models/

85 Elisabeth Jelin, *State Repression*, 33–34.

86 Todorov, *Los abusos de la memoria*, 32–33.

87 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.

88 Elisabeth Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2002), 69.

89 Elisabeth Jelin, *Las conmemoraciones: las disputas en las fechas infelices* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2002), 2.

90 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 276–322.

patterns of behavior or as implicit or virtual patterns—where the traditional material is adapted to the new situation, and, in this process, new elements of the material are discovered.

By taking into account the constitution of the Croatian diaspora community marked by the trauma of defeat and exile, we first identify two generations of survivors and their trauma. These are adult survivors (born between the end of the nineteenth century through to the 1920s, and active participants of World War II) and the child survivors or the 1.5 generation (born between 1930 and 1947), defined as "too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have been there … Unlike the second generation, whose most common shared experience is that of belatedness … the 1.5 generation's shared experience is that of premature bewilderment and helplessness … if all those who were there experienced trauma, the specific experience of children was that the trauma occurred (or at least, began) before the formation of stable identity that we associate with adulthood, and in some cases before any conscious sense of self."[91] For the child survivors, the experienced trauma at an early age "often becomes the historically oldest stratum of consciousness, which tends to stabilize itself as the natural view of the world."[92] The generations of survivors are inevitably marked by the common experience of trauma. But this trauma can also mark the post-memory generations (children or even grandchildren of the survivors) who have not lived the trauma themselves, but had it transmitted to them through their upbringing in such a way that they lived the memory as if it were their own,[93] whether as children (born in the 1950s and 1960s), or even grandchildren (born in the 1970s and 1980s), and sometimes even great grandchildren (born in the 1990s and 2000s). Alain Finkielkraut describes their thinking as: "Others have suffered and I, because I was their descendant, harvested all the moral advantage … Since the actors had been annihilated, it was left to their narrator, their heir, their offspring to appropriate the reaction of their audience … I owed to the bond of blood this intoxicating power to confuse myself with the martyrs."[94] The 1.5 generation is a hinge generation, which bridges the experience of witnesses or survivors and the post-memory generation, marked by their own trauma and by the trauma of their community.

91 Susan Robin Suleiman, "The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust," *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002): 277–95, 277.

92 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 299.

93 Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 5.

94 Alain Finkielkraut, *The Imaginary Jew* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 11–12.

An important observation must be made here. While situating my research within existing diaspora and memory studies, I have referenced authors who studied Holocaust survivors and their children. While I am definitely not arguing that the Croatian diaspora were a community exclusively of victims and traumatized survivors, my main point and a guiding thread of this book is that this is precisely how they have perceived and portrayed themselves across generations—as innocent victims of Communist killings, completely erasing from their memory the nature and crimes of the Nazi puppet NDH, whose regime they were either members or supporters of. As Eyerman and Turner stress, a generation shares "a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time."[95] The generations coexist and overlap in a continuous process where the transmission of memory occurs. And in this memory transmission the past is continuously reinterpreted and re-narrated.[96] However, "the narrations of memory are never transmitted, but rather constitute an occasion for an endless line of re-narrations that are constantly reformatted according to generational needs and frames of interpretation."[97] And, in this memory transmission, the past is continuously reinterpreted: "Inasmuch as the sequences of the past form our narrative identity and tell us what we are, the reinterpretation of the past is a work to be redone constantly, Penelope's task, which ensures the continuity of the house of Odysseus by undoing the work done the day before."[98] Therefore, it is essential to identify how the memory of the Croatian post-World War II diaspora was shaped and transmitted through generations, to detect continuities, discontinuities, and reconfigurations in memory transmission. Indeed, it is important to have in mind how the meaning was selected, re-signified, and reinterpreted from the present moment by subsequent generations, and the domestic and international contexts of these transformations.

Since memory transmission among the Croatian post-World War II diaspora in Argentina cannot be detached from its historical context, this book will also provide a detailed analysis of the conjuncture of Argentinian, Latin American, and worldwide political context during the Cold

95 Ron Eyerman and Bryan S. Turner, "Outline of a Theory of Generations," *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1998): 91–106, 91.

96 Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," 292.

97 Welzer, "Re-Narrations," 16.

98 Lucette Valensi, "Autores de la memoria, guardianes del recuerdo, medios nemotécnicos. Cómo perdura el recuerdo de los grandes acontecimientos," *Ayer* 32 (1998): 57–68, 68.

War and the global fight of the Croatian political émigrés for Croatian independence from socialist Yugoslavia that, in combination with the change of generations in the diaspora community, lead to different actions and framings of their raison d'être, and their collective trauma and memory. Thus, this book inevitably also stands at the intersection of the studies of diaspora politics,[99] nationalism,[100] and long-distance nationalism, which binds together immigrants, their descendants, and those who have remained in the *heimat* into a single transborder citizenry, "a sort of dubious, quasi-biological, displaced identity" living "their real politics long-distance, without accountability."[101] Finally, I draw from Safran's definition of diaspora's characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.[102]

99 William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99; Yossi Shain, "The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution," *SAIS Review* 22, no. 2 (2002): 115–43; Yossi Shain and Martin Sherman, "Dynamics of Disintegration: Diaspora, Secession and the Paradox of Nation-States," *Nations and Nationalism* 4, no. 3 (1998): 321–46; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008); Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

100 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2006); Alex J. Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-Old Dream?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

101 Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Center for German and European Studies, University of California, 1992), 5 and 12.

102 Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," 83–84.

Methodology and Corpus

In order to examine the continuity and changes of the diaspora narrative over time and generations, I studied written, photographic, and audiovisual material, as well as personal testimonies gathered through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. My research employs qualitative methodological tools of critical discourse and narrative analysis, as well as ethnographic observation.[103] The main contribution of this book is not only that it thoroughly studies an under-researched topic, but that it assembles the puzzle by contrasting sources from the diaspora, from socialist Yugoslavia, and from the host country, Argentina. It draws from extensive documentary evidence from various archives and sources from Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Italy, Argentina, and Uruguay, including intelligence reports, diplomatic notes and reports, political programs, speech transcripts, personal correspondence, and newspaper archives, as well as personal archives of the members of Croatian diaspora.

For the sources from Yugoslavia, I thoroughly analyzed the archival material and reports from the embassy of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in Buenos Aires from that period (1945–87)[104] and the archives of the State Security Service of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, in charge of the Croatian political émigré community abroad,[105] as well as other relevant secondary sources from the Yugoslav point of view, such as memoirs from that time by Slavoljub Đera Petrović, ambassador of the SFRY to Argentina in 1953–58,[106] or Blagoje Jovović, one of the authors of the failed assassination attempt against Pavelić in 1957.[107] I also analyzed the digital archives of the *Borba* Yugoslav daily at the Belgrade University Library Svetozar Marković.

I consulted the following sources in the host country, Argentina: the archive of the ministry of foreign affairs of the Argentine Republic (relations with the SFRY); the archives of the national immigration office; the archive of the Intelligence Directorate of the Buenos Aires Province Police

103 Rudolf de Cilia et al., "The Discursive Construction of Native Identities," *Discourse and Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 149–73; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

104 In 2019, when I carried out my research at the archives of the ministry of foreign affairs of Serbia, the last available year was 1987.

105 For more information on how the Yugoslav intelligence service operated, see Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations*.

106 Slavoljub Đera Petrović, *Sećanja i zapisi jednog borca i diplomate* (Belgrade: DTA, 2007).

107 Milorad T. Ćulafić, *Argentinski osvetnici. Atentat na Antu Pavelića* (Belgrade: Jasen, 2016).

(DIPPBA); the archival collection of Rogelio García Lupo; the reports of the Commission for the Clarification of the Arrival of Nazis to Argentina (CEANA). I also analyzed media outlets, such as Canal 13 video material (*Telenoche Investiga*) and local newspapers (*Clarín*, *La Nación*, *La Prensa*, *La Opinión*, *Buenos Aires Herald*), as well as newspapers of fascist groups, such as *Dinámica Social*.

I also used several personal archives of members of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and Uruguay, as well as materials from the archives of the State Security Service of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia located at the state archives of Slovenia. Except for this latter archive, I personally collected the sources myself. I would also have liked to have been able to access the recently declassified archives of Pope Pius XII in the Vatican archives, but the waiting list is too long, and although it certainly contains valuable information on the "Italian route," it is not that relevant for this book.

For written sources from the diaspora, the emphasis was put on the most important diaspora journals: *Hrvatska revija* (Croatian review), the most relevant journal in terms of domestic and international impact, as well as *Hrvatska misao* (Croatian thought), and the two journals of the memory entrepreneurs, *Hrvatska* (Croatia) and *Hrvatski narod* (Croatian nation). The journal *Studia Croatica*, in Spanish, was analyzed from its launching in 1960 until today. The journals established the diaspora narrative, offered survivors' testimonies, and documented each year's commemorations with speeches and photographic material. They were complemented with the material from the archive of Croats in Argentina[108] and books authored by the main political figures, as well as by or about members of the first and 1.5 generations, whether in books or memoirs,[109] testimonies in books and journals, speeches given at certain occasions, or Facebook posts. For the more recent periods, the same analysis was applied to photographic and audiovisual material of commemorations published online, as well as personal photo albums of members of the Croatian diaspora.

108 Archivo Croata de Argentina, https://www.studiacroatica.org/museum/museum.htm

109 For example: Daniel Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu* (Buenos Aires: UACRA, 1994); Stjepan Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice. Razmatranja o suvremenoj hrvatskoj problematici iz perspektive izbjegličkog logora* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2022); Eugen Dido Kvaternik, *Sjećanja i zapažanja: 1924–1945: Prilozi za hrvatsku povijest* (Zagreb: Naklada "Starčević," 1995); Karlo Mirth, *Život u emigraciji* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2003); Vinko Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 2 vols. (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1967); Vinko Nikolić, *Bleiburg: uzroci i posljedice* (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1988); Dinko Šakić, *S Poglavnikom u Alpama: 1946. godine:*(*dio uspomena iz veće cjeline*) (Split: Laus, 2001); Vjekoslav Vrančić, *Branili smo državu: uspomene, osvrti, doživljaji* (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1985); Dušan Žanko, *Svjedoci: izabrani eseji, prikazi, sjećanja* (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1987).

Around thirty semi-structured interviews were carried out with members of the 1.5 generation and the second generation, current memory entrepreneurs. The interviews were carried out in October 2016, November 2017, and July to September 2018, in Buenos Aires, Rosario, and Comodoro Rivadavia. During the interviews, some of the interviewees shared photos or other visual material. During the field research, I personally attended some commemorations, as well as other gatherings, and I also engaged in informal conversations with members of the Croatian diaspora community.

To conclude, this book is a unique academic volume on the historization of the memory of the Croatian post-World War II émigré community in Argentina and its intergenerational transmission of memory that shares the results of exhaustive archival research complemented with oral testimonies from the diaspora members.

Outline

The first chapter of the book starts from the date that marked the beginning of the community's exile, the defeat in World War II and the immediate aftermath. It will trace the different exile routes: the evacuation of officials' families well before the end of the war, the evacuation from Zagreb in May 1945, the repatriation of some of the political and military leaders and their execution, the Bleiburg postwar killings and forced repatriation through the so-called death marches, the ratlines and Pavelić's escape, and the issue of the NDH gold hidden in exile. Furthermore, the chapter will also talk about the group of Ustaša officials who opted to go back to the country and fight in the so-called Operation April 10 that also reinforced the community's trauma of defeat in the first period.

Since the bulk of the Croatian émigrés passed through the displaced persons camps, and the only exclusive Croatian camp was Fermo, the second chapter studies the start of a decades-long exile by reconstructing life in the camp and its symbolic place in the formation of the Croatian political émigré community in Argentina. Finally, the chapter also shows the flip side—the parts that were erased from the Croatian diaspora's memory because they were not instrumental to their narrative or because they contradicted it.

The third chapter is dedicated to destination Argentina, the émigrés' settlement and the linguistic and working obstacles they had to overcome, the organization of everyday life, and the pillars of memory and identity. The chapter also analyzes the textile industry as a predominantly Croatian sector and the contribution of Croatian highly skilled professionals to Argentinian

society. Special attention will be paid to endogamous marriages of the 1.5 generation and the second generation as a basis of community preservation.

The fourth chapter treats political and publishing activities, the internal political relations within the community over time, the relationship with local politics and the channels used for lobbying and forming strategic alliances with local political stakeholders, and networking with the Croatian diaspora worldwide. It also shows the interaction with the Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires. Special attention is paid to the violent actions undertaken mostly by Croatian émigré youth from the 1960s to 1980s.

The fifth chapter treats commemorations. Since the start of their arrival to Argentina in 1947 until today, Croats commemorate April 10, 1941, the foundation of the World War II NDH, and May 15, 1945, the Bleiburg postwar killings. A special section is dedicated to their counter-commemorations of November 29, 1943, Yugoslav statehood day, until the disintegration of Yugoslavia. With the independence of the Republic of Croatia in 1991, they started commemorating new homeland celebrations while keeping the old ones. This chapter studies commemorative practices of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and analyses how and why they keep marking the old commemorations and how they relate to and which meanings they ascribe to the new ones, as well as how the old and new celebrations are intertwined and interpreted by the post-memory generation.

The sixth chapter analyzes the preservation of memory and identity of the Croatian diaspora after Croatia became independent, to understand the motives and the processes of resignification of their community memory to preserve their identity and singularity. It covers the period of the 1990s and their lobbying for Croatian recognition by the Argentine Republic, their involvement in the purchasing and smuggling arms to Croatia, their war hero who died in the Homeland War—Branko Pilsel—and the *retornados*, Argentinian-born Croats who "returned" to Croatia. It also treats the declassification of files related to the arrival of Nazis to Argentina (CEANA) and the subsequent cases of extradition requests of Ustaša officials, Dinko Šakić and Ivo Rojnica. Finally, the chapter treats the politics of "re-Croatization" of the earlier waves of Croatian immigrants to Argentina who considered themselves Yugoslavs, Italians, or Austrians. Since these waves are not the object of study of this book, they are only briefly mentioned in this chapter.

The seventh chapter treats the 2000s, when the Argentinian-born Croats became memory guardians and entrepreneurs and re-signified their community history and changed their attitude towards the "new independent" Croatia. It also analyzes their return to Croatia and the spillover of their memory into mainstream and official memory in the Republic of Croatia

today, as well as the current relationship between the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and their "homeland"—Croatia.

The book concludes with an epilogue on memories that lie a bit, how the collective memory serves as a tool for the preservation of identity, but also how the memory itself, although without conflicts inside the community, is not carved in stone and goes through several reconfigurations. The research on the diaspora's commemorations of events from both wars (World War II and the war in Croatia 1991–95) shows similarities with those of today's Croatia, where politics of remembrance surrounding and defining them are also completely intertwined. The book will also draw a conclusion on the leverage of the Croatian diaspora in the times of Yugoslavia and their current role and influence on the nationalist parties in the modern Croatia that manipulate and instrumentalize traumas from the recent past for their narrow interests.

Finally, it is necessary to clarify what this book is not. It is not a book on the NDH in World War II because there are plenty of well-documented sources covering that period in both Croatian and English. It is not a book on Nazi ratlines either, which is also a topic that is sufficiently written about. Although some of the members of the Croatian émigré community entered Argentina through these clandestine routes, the focus of the book is what happened with the community of Croatian political émigrés after arriving in Argentina, and how they preserved and transmitted their narrative through generations. This volume covers that which has not been covered in depth so far, meaning what happened with the defeated side, especially after a large portion of the Croatian political émigrés settled in Argentina.

This is only one of the possible books that I could have written using the same material. Due to the necessary word limit and for the sake of clarity, I applied the Spanish saying, "*Para muestra, un botón*," meaning that I used illustrative examples rather than overwhelming the reader with too many repetitive examples of the same issue. Every chapter or element in this book could be expanded to a separate volume, but the (f)utility of such exercise is under question.

Other lines of further research arise from this work. One possibility would be a comparative study of other Croatian diaspora communities worldwide or of other anti-Communist diasporas in Argentina, especially coming from Eastern Europe. On another note, it would be interesting to engage in a comparative study of political émigré communities of opposite ideologies, such as the Spanish exiles and Croatian political diaspora in Argentina, since political émigré communities, regardless of their political orientation, tend to have similar logics, as we could draw from Schwarzstein's book on

Spanish exiles in Argentina.[110] Other possible further studies stemming from this book could be the re-Croatization of the Yugoslav community abroad, or gender perspective in the diaspora studies and the place of women in political émigré communities. Also, the new tools of digital humanities could provide an interesting contribution to the analysis of the gathered archival material.

110 Schwarsztein, *Entre Franco y Perón*.

1. Year Zero: The Defeat, the Exile, and Bleiburg

Abstract: The book starts from the date that marked the beginning of the community's exile—the loss in World War II and the immediate aftermath. It will trace different exile routes—the evacuation of officials' families well before the war ended, the evacuation from Zagreb in May 1945, the repatriation and execution of some political and military leaders, the Bleiburg postwar killings and forced repatriation, the ratlines and Pavelić's escape, and the issue of the NDH gold hidden in exile. The chapter also covers the group of Ustaša officials who opted for going back to the country and fighting in the so-called Operation April 10 that also reinforced the community's trauma in the first period.

Keywords: defeat, evacuation, Bleiburg postwar killings, ratlines, Operation April10, gold

The foundations of the Croatian diaspora as a community of exiles and their collective trauma and identity were set between the end of World War II and their arrival to their destination, Argentina. The events that represent their year zero and their foundational myth are defeat in World War II in May 1945 and its aftermath, so here it is essential to give an account of these cornerstones of their victimhood narrative. This chapter aims at clarifying some nuances that have been erased from the collective memory of the diaspora because they did not serve the purpose, but also significant events and moments that were later recurring topics and cornerstones of the narrative of different diaspora generations. Here we draw from secondary sources such as volumes written on that period, as well as testimonies given by the officials of the Ustaša regime in detention by Communist Yugoslavia, as well as memoirs written by the émigrés who managed to flee to Argentina.

In this chapter, the following topics will be covered: the evacuation of officials' families and some special groups well before the end of the war,

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-2

the exit from Zagreb in May 1945, the Bleiburg postwar killings and death marches, the repatriation of some political and military leaders and their execution, the ratlines (clandestine escape routes) and Pavelić's escape to Argentina, and different exile routes of some Croats who ended in Argentina. It will also treat two recurrent topics in the memory of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and worldwide: the issue of the NDH gold hidden in exile and the destiny of those who opted for going back to the country to fight in Operation April 10 that also marked the community in terms of political (in)activity in the first period.[1]

The Beginning of the End

Although in the mainstream memory of the diaspora, "the tragedy occurred in May," as the title of the book by Vinko Nikolić says,[2] the beginning of the end started earlier, and the NDH leadership began preparing for defeat since the end of 1943, after Fascist Italy was defeated. According to Uki Goñi, an American intelligence report from 25 November 1943 stated that the Pavelić government purchased 60 Argentine passports for evacuation purposes and funds had been transferred to Argentina. The passports may have been supplied directly in Croatia by the Argentine diplomatic legation in Zagreb.[3] Due to the landing of the Allies on the southern coast of France in mid-August 1944, alongside the entry of the Red Army and Yugoslav Partisans into Belgrade in October 1944 and Croatia (NDH) soon after, the NDH authorities made an agreement with the Third Reich representatives to evacuate families of distinguished officials and officers to German territory. The families of the top Ustaša officials were evacuated from Croatia in December 1944, including Pavelić's wife Marija and daughters Mirjana and Višnja.[4]

Furthermore, on the eve of Christmas 1944 the first wave of evacuations started. By the end of 1944 and early 1945, several trains of refugees arrived in the county of Schärding am Inn and the surroundings of Braunau in Upper

1 What was called Operation Gvardijan (see further in the text) by the Yugoslav secret services was called Operation April 10 by the Croatian diaspora.

2 Vinko Nikolić, *Tragedija se dogodila u svibnju—: jedna* [*prva*] *godina egzila u dnevniku "ratnog" zarobljenika broj 324.664: 1945. – 6. svibnja – 1946* (Zagreb: Školske novine, 1995).

3 Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 384.

4 Dinko Šakić, *S Poglavnikom u Alpama: 1946. godine:*(*dio uspomena iz veće cjeline*) (Split: Laus, 2001), 60.

Austria.[5] On Monday December 18, 1944, the first train of refugees departed from Zagreb to Austria, carrying three hundred women and children, some babies. A total of five trains went to Austria, one each month, carrying a total of 1,500 children to Schärding am Inn, Sueden, and Andorf. However, in spring 1945 many children caught meningitis, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, and measles, and since there was no medication, many of them died. Some of these refugees returned to Croatia by Easter 1945.[6] Others eventually went overseas, while a third group stayed and lived for many more years in the same temporary housing they adapted. One of these children born in 1935, who later emigrated to Argentina, remembers that they evacuated twice, first in December 1944 and returning around Easter, and then again in May 1945: "We first went into exile with a withdrawal in December 1944. They said that it would be for only two months. We arrived at a barrack in Austria on Christmas 1944. The hospital was contagious. Those who went to hospital did not come back, they died of scarlet fever. The mothers protested, they wrote to Poglavnik and we all went back to Zagreb for Easter."[7]

The children of top officials and politicians who left Croatia in that period and were old enough to remember the moment of leaving Croatia in December 1944 have vivid memories of the event. One, who was ten at the time, remembers the exact moment:

> The exit from Croatia occurred on 23 December 1944, just two days before Christmas. That day was awkward. My dad came home early, he and mum talked behind the closed doors for a long time, and when they got out of the room, they told us that we were going for a trip for a couple of days. We associated that with vacations. We got out at midnight with Germany as our final destination. We took bizarre things with us, as absurd as a big radio that accompanied us all the way to Argentina and a large cast-iron pot that my mother always used for cooking.[8]

He ended up with his mother and sister in Sudetenland, with a German family:

> It was a lovely house with a big garden. I remember two things: first, that the lady was a beautiful German woman, she had two children of

5 Ivan Pomper, "Austrija—Salzburg—Župa bl. Alojzija Kardinala Stepinca," accessed on March 26, 2024, https://ofm.hr/lokacija/austrija-salzburg-zupa-bl-alojzija-kardinala-stepinca/.

6 M. Vinić, "Iz uspomena jedne izbjeglice," *Danica*, Chicago, September 1949.

7 Interview with T.K. (born 1935), member of the 1.5 generation, September 10, 2018.

8 Interview with D.A.J. (born 1934), member of the 1.5 generation, July 30, 2018.

> the same age as my sister and me, so I learned German very well, and me and my sister played with them. The father of the family was coming every weekend. I was fascinated by the father, he was a very tall man, an Aryan,[9] wearing a black uniform and high shiny boots, and he wore SS insignia, he was an SS colonel. Later I realized what it meant to be an SS colonel, but it was in contrast with his affection and generosity, how he treated us, his wife, it was an ideal family.[10]

Another stated: "That whole time my mother was taking care of my baby brother, so she left me alone, I felt so free. My dearest memories are from the time when we were in Tirol. My first language was German, it was the language of play, and these are the memories of my biggest happiness. When we came here [Argentina], that came to an end."[11] Antonio Vrancic, son of NDH minister Vjekoslav Vrančić, whose mother took him and his brother to Austria in December 1944, remembers that, at first, they were hungry, which left him with lifelong trauma, that they lived in several houses (a hotel and private houses), and that he went to school and had Austrian friends. He also remembers being taken for sailing on a boat by American soldiers, and that he learned to ski, skate, and sled during this idyllic period.[12] His real trauma was consciously leaving the Austrian region of Tirol when he was already ten years old, remembering that he was devastated when saying goodbye to his friends.[13] For him, the trauma and the real exile came later, after leaving Austria and arriving in Argentina. All these groups left Croatia half a year before the defeat, the massive evacuation, and Bleiburg.

The Forgotten Case of the Blue Boys

The Blue Boys, also known as "Poglavnik's children" or "Poglavnik's protégés,"[14] was a group of forty-nine boys aged eight to eleven, orphans

9 According to *Collins Concise English Dictionary*, in Nazi doctrine an Aryan is a non-Jewish Caucasian, especially of Nordic stock.

10 Interview with D.A.J. (born 1934), member of the 1.5 generation, July 30, 2018.

11 Interview with S.E.K. (born 1942), member of the 1.5 generation, November 14, 2017.

12 Antonio Vrancic, *Marcapasos* (Buenos Aires: Dunken, 2018), 49–66.

13 Vrancic, *Marcapasos*, 67.

14 Branko Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci* (Zagreb: self-published, 2004), 62. The author, one of the Blue Boys, lists other nicknames: Poglavnik's orphans, cadettes, golden boys, or even "janissary" (the Ottoman Empire elite corps made up through the system of child levy enslavement from the empire provinces), as a reference to the purpose of "bringing up fanatically loyal soldiers to their high patron."

or those who lost one of their parents in the war, or, at a later stage, talented and prospective students who were sent to the Ustaša Boys Institute (Ustaški dječački zavod—UDZ) where they lived and went to school. They were supposed to carry out official duties when grown up. The UDZ was founded in April 1942, under the full official name: Private Boys' Primary School – Ustaša Boys Institute in Zagreb, Paunovac Street 7.[15] It was supposed to be the first of many similar institutes, but it remained the only one, so it became an exclusive Poglavnik school with strong ties to Pavelić's family.

According to the memoirs of one of the Blue Boys, Branimir Kovačević, written and published fifty years later with abundant photographic material to prove the story, they were very close to the Pavelić family and, in his home, they soon "transformed into real little princes, we behaved as we were there since forever, as we have been living in wealth since we were born, and a well-suited blue uniform only provoked loud expression of approval. At the Pavelić home we walked as pages at the king's court, and whenever a foreign head of state or a distinguished person came, we were the honorary platoon that embellished the ambient."[16] Also, every Sunday one or two boys from the UDZ would serve at Pavelić's home as altar boys, helping the priest Rafael Medić in the service.

To show their elite status, on May 31, 1944, twenty-six Blue Boys received their Catholic confirmation by the abbot Ramiro Giussepe Marcone, papal legate, the representative of the Holy See to the NDH. Furthermore, the boys' godfathers were Pavelić's son and twelve Ustaša officials (godfathering two boys each): State Secretary Andrija Artuković,[17] NDH government ministers Lovro Sušić, Ante Vokić, Vjekoslav Vrančić, Stjepan Hefer, Josip Balen, Julije Makanec, Viktor Prebeg, the then Mayor of Zagreb Ivan Werner, Ustaša colonels Erich Lisak and Ivan Ico Kirin, and the priest Rafael Medić.[18] The confirmation was held in St Mark's Church in Zagreb, and the later celebration in Novi Dvori (the Pavelić family residence) where they got a personal gift from the Poglavnik.[19] The proof of their special status is that they were among the first group to leave Croatia, on December 16, by bus, together with Poglavnik's family (wife Marija and

15 Official Gazette of the NDH Ministry of Education, May 18, 1942, as quoted by Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 61.

16 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 63.

17 Andrija Artuković was also minister of the interior (April 1941–October 1942 and April–November 1943) and minister of justice (October 1942–April 1942).

18 Medić was holding personal Masses at Pavelić's home every Sunday in Zagreb during World War II (Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 106).

19 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 100–102.

two daughters Mirjana and Višnja); soon after, the evacuation of high Ustaša officials' families started. Two days later, the evacuation of 1,500 women and children begun.

The Pavelić family was staying in Semmering, while the boys, accompanied by the priest Rafael Medić and nun Anka, stayed at the Almfrieden Hotel in Ramsau am Dachtsein, which still operates.[20] According to Kovačević, Marija and Višnja Pavelić visited them several times in 1945, although it is a 198 km distance.[21] Their stay at the hotel for more than two years was paid for by the Poglavnik himself, and there was one room reserved for Marija Pavelić, although she rarely used it, but even allegedly Ante Pavelić once paid a visit.[22] They also received donations from other high officials in Austria in exile; for instance, Jere Jareb stated that NDH minister Lovro Sušić gave 5,500 Reichsmarks "for the children of the former Poglavnik Institute in Ramsau, 2,500 to Brother Lino, and 3,000 to sister Anka."[23] It is no coincidence that the wife and two sons of the Third Reich ambassador to the NDH, Siegfrid Kasche, also stayed at the same hotel, and it was in fact Dorothea Kasche who chose the town and the building for the refuge of the Blue Boys and her own family.[24] Siegfrid Kasche, who was very close to Pavelić to the extent that Hitler labeled him as a "bigger Croat than Pavelić" escaped from Croatia to Austria on May 7, 1945; but he was arrested by the British Army near Wolfsberg and extradited to Yugoslavia where he was tried and sentenced to death together with Slavko Kvaternik and others on June 6, 1947.[25]

The Franciscan priest Lino Pedišić, who replaced Rafael Medić and accompanied the boys in Ramsau from mid-1945 to mid-1946, was a key figure in the reception of émigrés in Argentina. Zlatko Tanodi, who was the boys' geography and history teacher at Ramsau while studying in Graz,[26] as well as the two nuns who accompanied them in Ramsau, Anka Konjarek and Judita Grganić, also eventually ended in Argentina. Even fifty years later, Kovačević remembers precisely all the details and stops—as he calls it,

20 "Hundehotel in Ramsau am Dachstein: Traditional, hospitable, regionally conscious, in a natural setting that will refresh your heart. Our 'Almfrieden,' which, incidentally, was the first hotel in Ramsau am Dachstein not to evolve from a farm, is always a rewarding place to visit no matter what the time of year," accessed on June 25, 2025, https://www.almfrieden.at/en/.

21 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 95.

22 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 130.

23 Jere Jareb, *Zlato i novac Nezavisne Države Hrvatske izneseni u inozemstvo 1944. i 1945: dokumentarni prikaz* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Institut za povijest. Dom i svijet, 1997), 315.

24 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 64.

25 Zdravko Dizdar et al., eds., *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 183.

26 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 124.

their "Way of the Cross," a biblical reference to the diaspora's labeling of repatriation to Yugoslavia—on the way from Zagreb to Hotel Almfrieden in Ramsau, which they reached on Tuesday, December 19, 1944:

> a house as if from a fairy tale, located on the edge of a mountain meadow, on one side of it is a forest, on the other side is a gentle hill that climbs to the top at a height of almost three thousand meters. I had the feeling that, together with my 48 friends, I was reliving the story from the book about Heidi, a little girl who went from the city to the mountains to her grandfather and there, after initial disagreements, she experienced the most beautiful moments of her childhood. Our grandfather appeared in the form of Mr. Mathias Landl, the owner of the hotel who, together with his family, immediately came to help accommodate us as close and comfortable as possible.[27]

The author's memories of those times were idyllic, and he recalls that in Austria the Blue Boys lived happily and peacefully, learning German, English, and Italian, integrating and being accepted by the locals. However, Gerda Richter, a German woman who also stayed at Ramsau at the time, had different memories than the boys' childhood idyllic ones: "The boys were not especially uneducated, but it was 49 of them, and the house started to feel it. A lot of things were destroyed (beds, toilets, sinks…) and it cost a lot of money to repair this, which were born by Almfrieden."[28] She later went on to say that she heard on the radio that "the whereabouts of Pavelić's children were known and that they would be tracked."[29]

Already in mid-1946, a group of civilians accompanied by allied soldiers came for a visit and started asking the boys their personal data, their relatives' addresses, and if they wanted to go home.[30] They made files on all the boys and started tracing relatives through the International Red Cross in Yugoslavia. Also, they were explicitly mentioned at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) Third Session from September 11 to 3 October 3, 1946 at the Sub-Committee on Refugees,[31] where the Yugoslav delegate Leo Mates stressed that the "children in Ramsau are subject to

27 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 109.

28 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 131.

29 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 132.

30 According to Kovačević, the soldiers were "occupying forces." *Plavi dječaci*, 135.

31 *Check List of United Nations Documents*, Part 5, No. 1, Economic and Social Council, 1946–1947, First to Fifth Sessions, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/06/1430-20140410130220469409 3_0.pdf.

systematic alienation (*odnarođivanje*) from the homeland while the British authorities refuse repatriation."[32]

Furthermore, the Croatian Franciscan order in 1946 founded a seminary for the Herzegovina Franciscan Province in Grottammare, near Rome, and Brother Dominik Mandić, in charge of the seminary, was authorized to offer accommodation, food, and schooling to seminarians and authorized another Franciscan, Metod Kelava, to bring Croatian refugee children from Austria to Italy. Kelava went to Ramsau, where "children from the former 'Poglavnik dr. Ante Pavelić's Orphanage' were sent before the end of the war and transferred from Zagreb to Austria." After talking to Kelava, fifteen boys volunteered to go to Grottammare, so he then asked for authorization from the British authorities, who had already warned him that the Yugoslav authorities were requesting their repatriation. However, after that meeting, the British authorities immediately met with Yugoslav representatives, and eventually they decided to repatriate the children to Yugoslavia.[33] For the boys, it was terrifying: "Waiting for the result of that competition, we could not do anything else but fear. Who is coming for us first? When and how will that happen?"[34]

When on November 27, 1946, trucks and jeeps with soldiers appeared at Almfrieden, the boys dispersed and fled to the woods: "We were running as fast as we could, through the fields covered with snow. They were shooting behind us, of course, in the air to scare us, I am sure that that was the intent. But we were running, like real mountain game running before hound dogs, we were running like rabbits or foxes, deer or little wolves, but the hunt was long, the chasers were persistent."[35] Some were immediately caught and others hid in barns and houses of the locals, but eventually, in two days, all of the boys were caught and transferred to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) camp/children's home in Leoben; in January 1947 they were repatriated to Yugoslavia. On January 3, 1947, an article was published in the *Borba* daily with a headline: "Vatican Tries to Prevent the Return of Our Children from Austria," full of propaganda and mixed information (thinking that there were two different groups of children in both Ramsau and Leoben), and stating that they had been gathered by the order of Archbishop Stepinac and sent to the Paunovac Home in

32 *Politika*, September 20, 1946.

33 Metod Kelava, "U potrazi i borbi za hrvatsku djecu," in *Hrvatska revija—Jubilarni zbornik 1951–1975* (Munich–Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1976), 380–81.

34 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 142.

35 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 143.

Zagreb, where they were "taught that Hitler is the savior of humanity from bolshevism and that Poglavnik is the biggest and most deserving son of the Homeland, etc."[36] In sum, the claims were that they were indoctrinated by the NDH (which is not far from the truth judging by Kovačević's memoirs), and that then they were kidnapped and taken to a camp in Ramsau. They also stated that the British authorities forestalled the repatriation under pressure from the Vatican and that Kelava wanted to indoctrinate them and convert them into priests—"spiritual and political fighters against new Yugoslavia and their own people," accusing all those who were preventing the repatriation as kidnappers and traitors.[37] The article finishes with, "Our request: all Yugoslav children that were found perforce outside of our borders have to return. The homeland will know how to receive them."[38]

They were repatriated as a trophy. When the departure "before leaving for the enemy camp" to Zagreb became imminent, they made a vow of silence "to defend ourselves from potential abuse and fight for life."[39] Some decided to stay and to forestall the repatriation as much as possible. Kovačević recalls that it was traumatic for them, with a feeling as if they were going to be executed. However, they were well treated during the trip and when they eventually arrived in Zagreb, they were welcomed with banners, flowers, and music. The next day the photo was published in the news.

Kovačević goes on to say that they felt as if they had been brought to the enemy camp, although everyone was very kind to them. They went to the movies and church and even attended the holy Mass; they were bought board games, and the food was good. The second group arrived on February 28, 1947. One or two boys escaped and never returned to Zagreb. The boys were ultimately sent to their families or closest relatives, or the orphans remained in homes. Each of them had their own life path.[40]

It is worth noting that both the children of the Ustaša officials and the Blue Boys, those who evacuated from Croatia in December 1944 and stayed in Austria, have very idyllic memories of their refugee years. As we shall see in the next chapter, those whose path led them through displaced persons camps in Austria, Germany, and Italy (Fermo)—although their memories were much brighter than their parents'—were not so fortunate, and for them the trauma of exile already started there.

36 N.K., "Vatikan pokušava da spreči povratak naše dece iz Austrije," *Borba*, January 3, 1947, 3.
37 N.K., "Vatikan pokušava," 3.
38 N.K., "Vatikan pokušava," 3.
39 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 172.
40 Kovačević, *Plavi dječaci*, 172.

The Defeat and the Evacuation

One small group of top officials, including the NDH leader Ante Pavelić, made their way out of Croatia and into exile through the (in)famous clandestine routes called ratlines. Bogdan Krizman gives a detailed account in Croatian of Pavelić's route, based on documents and written memories of the participants and witnesses who fled, as well as testimonies from the hearings of arrested NDH political or military officials given to the Yugoslav intelligence services.[41] Both sources should be taken with a grain of salt, especially the testimonies from the police hearings, while the memoirs of the survivors are useful for this study since they also confirm the (again, biased) narrative of the émigré community. More recently, Ante Delić wrote a PhD thesis on the activities of Ante Pavelić from 1945 to 1953, where he also covers the escape route.[42] Other useful sources for non-Croatian speakers about ratlines are the book written by Aarons and Loftus,[43] and Uki Goñi's volume on the Nazi ratlines to Argentina (although with some factual mistakes), as well as Adriano and Cingolani's work that mostly relies on Krizman, Jareb, and other sources written in Croatian but also on Goñi's book. Since there is literature written about the topic, the Poglavnik's route will be briefly summarized and used as a guiding thread for the story of the escape routes of officials and to give an account of their memories, especially for those who were important political figures of the émigré community in Argentina.

This is how Ustaša official Daniel Crljen describes the situation at the end of the war in his romanticized account of events written in 1994:

> When the general unfavorable situation was reflected in the Croatian battlefields during the World War II, groups of terrified refugees came from the areas occupied by the Partisans, bringing apocalyptic news about the crimes committed by rampant Serbia and cold terrorist Bolshevism. The population of the capital city of Zagreb tripled, and many thousands of refugees were constantly pouring in from the East and the South, seeking salvation in the free territory of the Independent State of Croatia, which increasingly resembled the famous and tragic "reliquiae reliquiarum

41 Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986).

42 Ante Delić, "Djelovanje Ante Pavelića 1945.–1953. Godine" (PhD dissertation, University of Zadar, 2016).

43 Mark Aarons and John Loftus, *Unholy Trinity: The Vatican, the Nazis, and the Swiss Banks* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998).

olim inclyti regni Croatiae" (the remnants of the once-glorious Croatian kingdom).[44]

The "general unfavorable situation" meant that the Ustaša regime was losing the war and that they had to withdraw. And as we will also see throughout this book, the memoirs of Ustaša officials usually emphasize the antifascist Partisans' crimes committed during and after World War II (also labeling them differently as Serb-Communists, Yugo-Četniks, terrorist Bolsheviks, etc.), and interpret themselves as innocent victims fleeing from the blood-thirsty Bolsheviks. He continues, saying: "Although the romantic dilettantes of strategy wanted to see in the heroism of the Croatian [NDH] army an impenetrable barrier to all enemy attacks, our gunners felt differently when they anxiously noted that their anti-tank guns could not even penetrate the armored tanks with which the enemy was charging, that their machine guns had fired the last bursts of scarce ammunition, and their planes could no longer take off because they were out of fuel."[45]

Clearly the NDH government realized that the defeat was imminent and there were discussions whether to stay and resist or withdraw. The Poglavnik eventually opted for the latter. Before adopting a formal decision on withdrawal, on May 4, 1945, Pavelić sent Vjekoslav Vrančić, NDH minister of crafts and commerce, to carry a memorandum of the NDH government to Field Marshall Harold Alexander, the supreme commander of the Allied Force Headquarters in the Mediterranean, stationed in Caserta, near Naples, Italy. In the memorandum the NDH put itself "under the custody" of the Allies and requested Allies to send military troops to the Croatian territory. The mission failed and Vrančić was arrested before reaching Caserta.

Ante Pavelić left Zagreb on May 6, 1945. On the same day, the government authorities and competencies,[46] as well as the NDH diplomatic archives, were transferred to Cardinal Stepinac, and treasure was withdrawn from the central bank.[47] Part of the treasure was given to the Archdioceses of Zagreb, and part was taken into exile. Also, on May 7, 1945, the commandership was transferred to general Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, who stayed in Croatia and did not withdraw.[48] He later fled to Spain.

44 Daniel Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu* (Buenos Aires: UACRA, 1994), 3.

45 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 4.

46 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 3.

47 On the issue of the NDH gold, see further in the chapter.

48 Luburić was the NDH Ustaša colonel in charge of the concentration camps system, founder of Jasenovac, the largest Ustaša extermination camp, a symbol of Ustaša terror. After WWII, he fled to Spain, where he organized Hrvatski narodni otpor (Croatian National Resistance), one of

Pavelić and a group of officials entered Austria on May 8, planning to get to Wolfsberg and Klagenfurt. Because the zones of occupation of Austria were not established before July 1945, they had to change plans and routes after they realized that they were going to an area under the Russian troops' control, and crossed the Alps to the Allied zone in mid-May 1945, in a group of six people. They crossed the Tauern Alps towards Liezen and the river Enns where there was a delimitation between the Russian and the US zones. As witnessed by the Ustaša head of the Zagreb police and chief of Pavelić's security, Ivan (Ico) Kirin, after crossing the Alps and entering the US zone, the soldiers checked their IDs and let them through.[49] This fact is no surprise, because the soldiers surely could not recognize Ante Pavelić, or even know who he was. As with all the ratlines stories, there were a lot of speculations and theories that Pavelić escaped dressed as a woman or a nun, alluding to his cowardice, but contrary to that, he most probably walked through the checkpoints without having to hide or mask himself, especially in the Alps. As Phillippe Sands points out in his book on the escape of Otto Wächter, Nazi governor of occupied Poland who hid in the Alps for almost four years while his wife paid regular visits to him, "the Americans and the English were too lazy to go up in the mountains," or they did not know how the war criminals they were "looking for" looked.[50] In Italy and particularly in Rome, in the first two years the US intelligence services, especially the Counterintelligence Corps (CIC), "hunted Nazis for prosecution," but after that initial period "they were hunting them as recruits," meaning that they could be useful allies against the Soviets.[51] They knew about and chose to ignore aspects of the past of their potential recruits. Also, "by 1949, the CIC, other American agencies and the British were well aware that many of the supposed 'refugees' who entered Italy were Nazis, or complicit in Nazi crimes. They were aware too of the Nazi escape routes, the use of false identities, how travel documents were obtained, and the role of the Red Cross and certain individuals associated with the Vatican."[52] As Sands stresses, the CIC worked closely with Krunoslav Draganović, Croatian Franciscan priest

the most radical nationalist émigré organizations with an armed branch that was involved in terrorist activities in the 1970s. He was killed on April 20, 1969, by Ilija Stanić, UDBA (Yugoslav Directorate for State Security) agent, and buried in Carcaixent, near Valencia, Spain, where his remains lay today.

49 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 20.

50 Philippe Sands, *The Ratline: Love, Lies and Justice on the Trail of a Nazi Fugitive* (New York: Vintage Books, 2022), 155.

51 Sands, *The Ratline*, 245.

52 Sands, *The Ratline*, 242.

associated with the Saint Jerome Institute in Rome, who was one of the key figures of the ratlines and overall emigration to South America.[53]

According to testimony given by Dolores Bracanović, who was in the selected group with Pavelić, after fourteen days of hiking they eventually met two women who told them that there is "a fine Croatian family living in the castle of Leingreith, property of Count Nostit," which "turned out" to be Pavelić's wife and daughters.[54] Most certainly Pavelić knew where his family was staying. They arrived there on May 18 and stayed until June.

If we look at the memoirs and testimonies of top officials, the evacuation or massive exile was a complete chaos and fight for bare survival, and the masses of people were pouring towards Slovenia and then Austria, moving at a very slow pace. For the commander of NDH aviation, General Vladimir Kren, they were left on their own, knowing that they would be extradited, so it was a hopeless and consternating situation.[55] General Ante Moškov, the commander of the Poglavnik Bodyguard Division (Poglavnikov Tjelesni Sdrug), in his testimony given during Yugoslav police interrogation allegedly said that seeing Pavelić fleeing to the woods, running for his life in panic, made him feel disappointed and, realizing that Pavelić was a coward, concluded: "Poor Croatia, with such a leader."[56] Others, such as Matija Kovačić, describe the chaos and desperation during the evacuation from Zagreb,[57] while Ivo Rojnica, who will also later end in Argentina, described in his memoirs the similar withdrawal from Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the west.[58] Vinko Nikolić pointed to the human misery, egoism, and covetousness, giving details on how people who had some food kept it for themselves and "their group."[59] The civilian memoirs portray similar, or even worse despair, uncertainty, and struggle for survival.

Out of the nineteen ministers in Pavelić's government, sixteen withdrew to Austria together, one (Admiral Nikola Steinfel) accompanied Pavelić, the already mentioned Vjekoslav Vrančić went to Italy with the memorandum,

53 Sands, *The Ratline*, 242.

54 Bracanović was a commander of the female Ustaša Youth (Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 47). She gave a thorough account of the withdrawal in a special issue of the journal *Hrvatska* from Buenos Aires dedicated to an homage on the death of Ante Pavelić. Dolores Bracanović, "S Poglavnikom na povlačenju," in *Hrvatska. Spomen—izdanje u počast nezaboravnog Poglavnika* (Buenos Aires, April 10, 1960), 18–19.

55 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 17, citing Nikolić, *Tragedija se dogodila u svibnju*, 241–42.

56 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 18.

57 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 33.

58 Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2 vols. (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1983), 2:216.

59 Nikolić, *Tragedija se dogodila u svibnju*, 86–87.

and one, Savo Besarović, stayed in Croatia. The group of sixteen split into three groups and surrendered to the British Allies who extradited some of them to Yugoslavia on May 17, including the president of the NDH government Nikola Mandić, and a dozen top civilian and military officials.[60] They were immediately put on (show) trial on June 6, 1945, found guilty for great treason and war crimes and sentenced to death by hanging,[61] shooting,[62] life imprisonment,[63] and twenty years of prison.[64]

Some of the NDH government officials, especially its ministers, managed to flee such destiny. They were in DP camps or in private accommodation, but constantly feared the possibility of repatriation. Such was the case of *doglavnik* (deputy leader) and NDH minister of interior Mate Frković, who was arrested and detained in camp Spittal an der Drau by the British Army on May 18, 1945; he was released in July 1945 when he transferred to Italy. In Italy he was again arrested by the British Army and detained in Belluno and then Treviso, waiting to be extradited to Yugoslavia, but he was rescued by fellow Croats. He then went to Rome where he founded the Croatian State Leadership (Hrvatsko državno vodstvo), together with Pavelić, Lovro Sušić, and Božidar Kavran, which was in charge of organizing resistance in Croatia (see Kavran group further in the text).[65] In 1947 he went back to Austria, where he was offered accommodation near Salzburg by a friend who turned out to be an infiltrated Yugoslav secret service collaborator, who then tried to drug him by offering him morphine in Chianti wine (he remembered the brand). When he was about to fall asleep, two members of the Yugoslav secret services entered the room and tried to kidnap him and put handcuffs on his left arm, but he managed to fight with his right arm and they fled. He kept the handcuffs as a souvenir.[66]

Vjekoslav Vrančić, the minister who carried the memorandum to Italy went from *Carrying the White Flag across The Alps* to *Twelve Months behind The Barbed Wire,* as the titles of his book chapters state.[67] Vrančić and his aid Andro Vrkljan never got to deliver the memorandum to Field Marshall

60 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 26, footnote 23.

61 These were Ustaša deputy leader (*doglavnik*) Mile Budak, Colonel Joso Rukavina, and Martial Court President Ivan Vidnjević.

62 These were Nikola Mandić, president of the NDH government, Julije Makanec, minister, Nikola Steinfel, minister, and Dr. Pavao Canki, minister.

63 This was Ademaga Mešić, Ustaša deputy leader (*doglavnik*).

64 These were Lavoslav Milić, general-lieutenant, and Bruno Nardelli, Ustaša governor of Dalmatia.

65 Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 123.

66 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 182.

67 Vjekoslav Vrančić, *U službi domovine* (Washington, DC: HB Press, 2007).

Alexander in Caserta. They first flew to Klagenfurt, Austria, crossed to Italy and eventually got to Marocco, near Venice on May 7, 1945, when they contacted British authorities who promised them that the next day they would be transferred to Caserta by plane. However, since that night Nazi Germany capitulated, they were immediately detained and taken to a POW camp in Mestre, Italy, and after that through several camps and prisons in Forlì, Terni, Grottaglie, and Afragola. He and two other Croats, NDH minister of foreign affairs Stijepo Perić and Ustaša colonel Ćiril Ćudina, managed to escape from Afragola with the help of three Croatian sailors who were also British prisoners, and got to Naples. He then remembered that he had a friend in Naples who helped him get to Rome, and then he eventually emigrated to Argentina, where he was politically very active, as we shall see later in the book.

Apart from Bleiburg, and the so-called Kavran group capture (see later in this chapter), this was another hard blow that marked the starting point of the victimization narrative for the Croatian political émigré community. According to Bracanović, when Pavelić learned about the execution of his government members, he left Leinhart and went into hiding.[68] He hid in different monasteries, disguised as a priest in the US zone near a salt mine where he stayed until October 1946.[69] He then transferred to Italy where he changed at least seven addresses, ranging from Rome, the Vatican, and Castel Gandolfo, to Posillipo, Naples, where he spent more than a year awaiting to be transferred to Argentina.[70] As already pointed out by Sands in the case of Otto Wächter, Uki Goñi, drawing from Ante Pavelić's CIC file and other US intelligence reports, shows that his whereabouts were known to the British and US agents. On August 7, 1947, they planned to arrest Pavelić as soon as he left the Vatican precinct,[71] but the arrest was never carried out since they received "contradictory 'Hands off' instructions in July. The likely embarrassment to the Vatican and the adverse effect on the recruitment of former Nazis for the Cold War weighed too heavily in the final balance—certainly heavier than procuring justice for Pavelić's hundreds of thousands of victims," as his extradition "would only weaken the forces fighting atheism and aid Communism."[72] Pavelić was never arrested and he eventually boarded the ship *Sestriere* from Naples on October 11, 1948,

68 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 125.
69 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 146.
70 Delić, *Djelovanje Ante Pavelića*, 151.
71 Goñi, *The Real Odessa*, 416.
72 Goñi, *The Real Odessa*, 418.

with a Red Cross passport no. 74369 under the false name of Pal Aranyos,[73] widowed Hungarian engineer, aged 59.[74] He arrived in Buenos Aires on November 6, 1948, where his family already settled, as along with many top NDH political and military officials who managed to flee to Argentina.

The Bleiburg Postwar Killings

Unlike these two small groups—those who evacuated on Christmas 1944, and some of the NDH political and military officials—an overwhelming majority of army and accompanying civilians took the route(s) through Slovenia to Austria, and a portion of the army eventually ended up at the Bleiburg field in mid-May 1945 where the idea was to surrender to the Allies, precisely the British Army. Here I am again drawing from the memories of Colonel Danijel Crljen, one of the members of the Ustaša delegation at the surrender talks on May 15, 1945, at Bleiburg Castle, who eventually found refuge in Argentina where he died. He started his lecture commemorating Bleiburg in 1993 describing the day before the evacuation, how there was confusion and lack of coordination, and how he learned that "the withdrawal of the army is scheduled for the next day [May 7] at four o'clock in the morning." He and other army members decided to confess to a Franciscan priest, and "settled their accounts with God … We all felt that we were getting ready for a long journey, which for each of us could be a journey to eternity."[75] On the day of the withdrawal or evacuation, "at the windows and along the house lines, the crowd greets the marching army. Through tears, they throw us 'Goodbye!' Military orderlies try to manage the chaotic traffic. With a deafening noise, tanks tear up the asphalt and roll past us. We overtake a colorful mixture of pedestrians, cars, horses, herds of oxen, trucks, cars, bicycles, and motorbikes."[76]

Although they were advancing slowly, they found the first obstacle on May 9 in Celje, where they met Slovenian partisans, and this is where General Vjekoslav Servatzy called Crljen to join the delegation, together with generals Servatzy, Herenčić, and Metikoš, and the Montenegrin Četnik representative Krivokapić.[77] After the meeting with the Partisans, where, according to Crljen, the Ustaša showed that they were much stronger, they

73 Goñi, *The Real Odessa*, 423.

74 "Arribo de Inmigrantes" (Arrival of Immigrants) search tool, Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos, www.cemla.com.

75 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 6.

76 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 6.

77 Četnik were World War II Serb royalist and nationalist guerrillas.

got a free pass through Celje. Crljen stated that he had given the original written testimony to Vinko Nikolić for publication and it had been stolen from Nikolić during his move from Argentina to Spain.[78] The troops then continued in the direction of Slovenj Gradec and Dravograd. They passed by German troops withdrawing twice, first by force, then after talks.[79]

The next obstacle was the Bulgarian troops' control point under the command of the Red Army general Tolbukhin and, upon their suggestion, instead of going to Dravograd they took a turn towards Bleiburg. On May 13, 1945, they had an encounter with the Yugoslav Army to whom they refused to surrender. In their attempt to get to Austria, they were surrounded by partisans and entered into a battle where some of the Ustaša soldiers were captured, and around 1,500 were killed, while the rest proceeded towards Bleiburg and finally reached the British troops on May 14, 1945.[80] That night they asked for an audience with the British Army brigadier Patrick T. P. Scott, requiring protection by the Allies. The officer supposedly told them that they would meet the next day, on May 15, since the night was already falling, and the Partisans were behind his troops.

The next day, the Ustaša delegation made up of generals Servatzy and Herenčić and Colonel Crljen went to the talks held at castle Thurn-Valsassina to surrender to the British Army.[81] However, Scott informed them that they "should be treated as illegal gangs, because [they] should have surrendered eight days ago but they kept fighting,"[82] and that they must surrender to the Allied forces they were fighting against, meaning the partisans. Herenčić called the partisans a "band of robbers," when the English general cut him off, saying "They are our allies." Herenčić was speechless and disheartened, so then Crljen took the floor and asked for the protection of civilians, saying: "It is the custom of civilized countries to receive and protect political refugees. We also expect this protection from the victorious powers of England and the United States," while Herenčić insisted "that this is about a multitude of people fleeing from communism, and we ask that your political forums be asked for instructions for our case."[83] Then Crljen took the floor, allegedly saying: "There is no doubt,

78 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 9.

79 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 84, quoting Danijel Crljen, "Bleiburg," *Hrvatska revija*, XVI, December 1966, Vol. 2–4 (62–64), 263–97.

80 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 95–98.

81 Only Herenčić and Crljen entered the room.

82 Crljen in Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 105. Curiously, this part of the events was written by Crljen in 1967 but left out in 1994.

83 This part was also mentioned in the account published in 1967 but taken out from the 1994 memoir.

general, that sooner or later a war will break out between the free world and Bolshevism, behind which either the free world or Bolshevism will remain. We regret that we came too soon, that we ask the free world for protection against Bolshevism, and because of this the Croatian people will have to suffer the worst disaster in their history."[84] This point reflected a belief held by many Ustaša officials, Pavelić included, that a World War III would break out soon and that then they would get support from the Allies to reestablish the NDH. Vjekoslav Luburić later commented that "how could we be so naïve to think that the western democracies would do what we really wanted—supply us with artillery, tanks and airplanes—we needed to stop the Russians."[85]

After that, Brigadier Scott invited the representatives of the Yugoslav Army to the table to talk about the surrender in his presence. Milan Basta, a Serb from Lika, Partisan lieutenant colonel and political commissar, gave the Ustaša instant orders to hoist white flags at the camp and organize the surrender of the troops in one hour.[86] He allegedly said: "Women and children are going back home, the soldiers are getting in prison, and the officers to the martial court in Maribor." They tried to buy time and get twenty-four hours for surrender but "Basta immediately cuts it off: 'Even one hour is too much.'"[87] In his memoirs, Milan Basta wrote a chapter titled "Ustaša Are Asking for Mercy," also mentioning that Crljen stood up, abruptly interrupted the conversation, and began to speak nervously, addressing the English commander and "giving him history lessons and how they will never forgive him for allowing 300,000 Croats to fall into the hands of the enemy who will exterminate them, etc."[88] Crljen finally requested that the ultimatum hour began only when the delegation returned to their command: "That was Basta's only concession. The ultimatum will start running in twenty minutes."[89]

Grahek Ravančić summarizes the aftermath: "Following capitulation, soldiers were released from their oaths, and each person sought to save himself, often not knowing to whom he was surrendering."[90] Herenčić and

84 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 13.

85 John Ivan Prcela and Dražen Živić, *Hrvatski holokaust. Dokumenti i svjedočanstva o poratnim pokoljima u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko društvo političkih zatvorenika, 2001), 49.

86 Milan Basta, *Rat je završen sedam dana kasnije* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1980), written from the partisan point of view.

87 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 14.

88 Basta, *Rat je završen sedam dana kasnije*, 362.

89 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 14.

90 Martina Grahek Ravančić, "Controversies about the Croatian victims at Bleiburg and in 'Death marches'". *Review of Croatian history,* 2.1 (2006), 27-46, 42.

Crljen decided to flee to the woods and not surrender.[91] Chaos started to reign, and they did not hoist white flags or surrender their weapons until they were fired at and shelled by both the Yugoslav Partisans and the British army, with dozens of casualties on Bleiburg field itself. After the surrender, they were then repatriated back to Yugoslavia and extrajudicially killed or taken to forced labor camps after weeks of death marches through the country where many died of exhaustion, were killed when they tried to run, or were attacked by the local population where they were passing. The surrender, the killings and the aftermath are commonly referred to as "Bleiburg" and it is the greatest victimization mark for the political émigré community. In his 1993 lecture, Crljen concludes: "Our generals, either Ustaša or Home Guard, were taken to Belgrade where they were sentenced to death, because there could be no other punishment for the military enemies of Serbia. A large number of captured Croatian soldiers and a good number of civilian refugees were placed in prison columns exposed to systematic slaughter, during the endless Way of the Cross, which filled bottomless pits like Jazovka. Those who survived paid tens of years of imprisonment for an unforgivable crime, because they were born as Croats."[92] This account of the events almost fifty years later showcases how the memory of the Ustaša defeat and surrender has been re-signified as a victimization narrative and how in their view and over time and across generations the defeated Ustaša officers turned Ustaša into synonyms for Croats who were fighting against Serbian expansionism, intentionally disregarding the fact that Croats also participated in the antifascist struggle and the Yugoslav Army. As will be seen later in this book, this memory twisting also allowed them to reinterpret the Nazi puppet NDH as a precursor to the independent and democratic Republic of Croatia and the war in Croatia (1991–95), during the time when Crljen gave this speech, as the continuation of Ustaša struggle for Croatian independence.

Apart from representing the most traumatic mark in the collective memory of the community, the responsibility for the defeat and the surrender and the killings were widely discussed in the diaspora journals and publications. For instance, Petričević directly blamed Ante Pavelić as the sole responsible person,[93] and Bareza blamed both Pavelić and his government, but also Serbs and Croatian Communists, as well as world

91 This was also left out by Crljen in the 1994 lecture booklet.

92 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 16.

93 Jure Petričević, "Hrvati i Jugoslavija. Osvrt na politiku Vladka Mačeka," *Hrvatska revija* 3 (1956): 213–39.

leaders for their silence.[94] It was also a personal mark and responsibility for Crljen as the delegation member, witness, and survivor who gave many talks about the event. Ivo Rojnica, although directly blaming the Yugoslav Partisan Army under Tito's command as the main culprits for the crimes committed at Bleiburg and its aftermath, also stated that the responsibility should be sought among their own ranks as well, because the captain should never abandon the sinking ship. He then points to Crljen and Herenčić who "got out of that chaos and fled cowardly. The consequence of that was a headless situation, that was created among the army and civilians. The tragical consequences are known to everyone." He also regretted that no resistance was offered because in that case "we would have proven that we were organized and disciplined army fighting and defending the honor of Croatian people and its state … Our honor would have been saved."[95]

As Neda Rosandić Šarić, a member of the 1.5 generation, said, this was the prevalent feeling among the community: "For a long time, many Croats thought that it was a matter of negotiations, so Professor Crljen was exposed to accusations that he should have done more. However, it is true that the British threatened to fire and shell if the Croats did not immediately lay down their arms."[96] In 1988, a whole volume was published by émigré publisher *Hrvatska revija* "on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the tragedy," showing that the mark of trauma of Bleiburg lasted for decades.[97]

Also, as early as 1951, in the diaspora journals we find disagreement regarding the number of victims. Although without scientific basis, the number oscillates from 150,000 claimed by Petričević,[98] to "at least" 200,000 stated by Kamber,[99] while Jelić states that one million Croats were killed during and after the war.[100] If we look at more recent academic attempts to establish the number of victims, according to Tokić, "out of the two hundred thousand people who reached Austria in May 1945, some seventy thousand were killed, of whom fifty thousand were Croats."[101] Grahek Ravančić gives

94 Petar Bareza, "Bleiburška katastrofa, Prigodom 15. godina velikog hrvatskog exodusa," *Hrvatska revija* 1, no. 37 (1960): 31–43, 34.

95 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 48–49.

96 Neda Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega—Moj otac Mime Rosandić* (Čitluk: Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Čitluku, 2021), 103.

97 Vinko Nikolić, *Bleiburg: uzroci i posljedice* (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1988), 107.

98 Petričević, "Hrvati i Jugoslavija," 1956.

99 Dragutin Kamber, "Naša neposredna stvarnost," *Hrvatska revija* 1 (1951): 123–28, 127.

100 Branimir Jelić, "Memorandum Hrvatskog narodnog odbora u Muenchenu," *Hrvatska revija* 2 (1952): 159–65.

101 Mate Nikola Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism During the Cold War* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020), 23.

a detailed overview of the different and partial accounts of the events at Bleiburg given by the witnesses, and also addresses the issue of the number of victims, concluding that "The number of victims of those vengeful operations is still an open question. Estimates of between 200,000 and 600,000 victims are probably? Certainly? exaggerated."[102] She then goes on to conclude that probably the most precise and most widely accepted account was given by Vladimir Žerjavić, basing his calculus on the population censuses from 1931 and 1948, and on a statistical assessment of expected population growth: "only around 75,000 army personnel and 45,000 civilians arrived at the Austrian border, and that the advance of the Yugoslav army in 1945 resulted in the disarming of only part of the NDH forces. He [Žerjavić] believes the largest number of victims occurred during the 'death marches,' during which 26,500 soldiers and 6,800 civilians perished. He estimates that in actions before the surrender, 11,600 people lost their lives, with another 12,000 interned in the camp at Viktring."[103]

Operation April 10—Operation Gvardijan

Not all the NDH soldiers abandoned the territory of Croatia and Yugoslavia but stayed and hid in the woods. As already mentioned, Vjekoslav Maks Luburić was appointed as the commanding officer for these forces and decided not to withdraw or surrender, naively thinking that Pavelić was right, "that the US will recreate Croatia and help our Armed Forces."[104] Radelić states in his book that in the immediate aftermath of World War II, there were around 2,500 to 3,000 soldiers split into small groups and without coordination, usually coming from the regions where they were hiding in the woods, aided by their families with food and supplies, carrying out sporadic guerrilla actions and incursions.[105] They called themselves the Crusaders (*Križari*), and their slogan was "For Christ, against the Communists" (*Za Krista, protiv komunista*). Among other acts of violence, the Križari sabotaged communications and rail lines, targeted public and governmental officials for assassination, attacked police and army installations, and even destroyed collective farms. For instance, on May 1, 1948, *Hrvatska* from

102 Grahek Ravančić, "Controversies about the Croatian victims at Bleiburg and in 'Death marches'",46.

103 Grahek Ravančić, "Controversies about the Croatian victims at Bleiburg and in 'Death marches'",46.

104 Zdenko Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj 1945.-1950* (Zagreb: Alfa, 2011), 207.

105 Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*.

Buenos Aires relayed the news that *Danica* journal from Chicago reported that one battalion belonging to a group north of the Croatian army and the Crusaders units sabotaged the railway Zagreb–Varaždin, entered the fight, and managed to break out from a Yugoslav ambush.[106] In the next issue, the same journal reports that some "Croatian officials in the woods have been promoted."[107]

In a remarkable plot twist, the Partisans and the Ustaša switched roles—the Ustaša fled to the woods, and the Partisans took over the government. There was a significant portion of NDH officials in favor of the guerrilla resistance, while Pavelić was against it, stating at the last meeting of the armed forces headquarters on May 8, 1945: "you go to the woods when the war starts, not when it ends," meaning that it was futile to start a guerilla fight after the defeat.[108] The Yugoslav Partisans swiftly acted and captured many remaining NDH soldiers, so by the end of July 1945 there were 1,500 men in the woods.[109] After an initial lack of organization, they started to organize, while the Yugoslav authorities sought the way to infiltrate themselves among their lines.

The aim of Operation April 10 was to go back to Croatia, connect all the Crusaders groups, and act in an organized way to make possible the comeback of the Ustaša members and wait for the conflict between the West and the USSR to spur a mass uprising in Croatia and overthrow the Yugoslav Communist authorities and reinstall the NDH. However, since the very beginning, the Yugoslav secret services UDBA infiltrated their ranks and organized Operation Gvardijan and arrested all the ninety-six members of a total of eighteen groups that entered Croatia between July 20, 1947, and July 4, 1948. In fact, apart from the first group, all the others were captured at the border. The UDBA managed to capture a great number of the highest NDH political and military officials, and—together with the capture and repatriation of half of the NDH government in May 1945 and the show trials in June 1945—this was another huge blow for the Ustaša movement and plans. By the end of 1948, the Crusaders guerrilla group was almost completely eradicated, while in the 1950s there were only some rare armed incidents. It was not until 1972 that a similar action had been attempted, and again failed.[110] Although Radelić managed to identify some of

106 "Akcije pokreta otpora u Hrvatskoj," *Hrvatska* 9, May 1, 1948, 5.

107 "Vijesti iz zarobljene Domovine. Promaknuće hrvaskih častnika u šumi," *Hrvatska*, 10, May 10–15, 1948, 3.

108 Srećko Rover, *Svjedočanstva i sjećanja* (Zagreb: Protektor, 1995), 90.

109 Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*, 214.

110 For the Bugojno group, see chapter 4.

the people who worked as UDBA undercover agents, all the UDBA "moles" that infiltrated Operation April 10 ranks and sabotaged it are unknown today. As with most of the events that are the subject of this chapter, there are many speculations on the responsibility and the tragic end of the action.

The operative leader of the action was Božidar Kavran with the approval of Ante Pavelić, although he was not directly involved and he later distanced himself from it. Kavran was regularly reporting to Pavelić, even in the spring of 1948, and supposedly both Kavran and Pavelić knew by that time that the operation was going to fail, but Kavran went back to Croatia anyway so that he would not be considered a traitor.[111] Ivan Prusac, one of the survivors of the so-called Kavran group, also stated that Kavran surrendered voluntarily to the UDBA.[112] After arresting almost all the members, Božidar Kavran being the last one, on July 4, 1948, the UDBA aborted its mission.[113] On July 12, 1948, the ministry of the interior published that they captured ninety-six "spies and terrorists" between July 20, 1947, and July 3 1948.[114] Vinko Nikolić claimed that, apart from the members of the Kavran group, around two hundred more people in Croatia were investigated.[115]

A group of fifty-five were publicly tried by the Supreme Court of Croatia from July 12, to August 27, 1948, at the Zagreb Fair great hall building, while thirty-six were tried before the court martial in three groups. The public trial was transmitted on the radio but was also reported by the main daily newspapers. On July 13, 1948, *Borba* published an article on the start of the trial on two out of four pages, titled "Accused Ustaša Infiltrated into Our Country as Imperialist Agents to Carry out Act of Terrorism and Espionage," wrongly stating that the head of the operation was the "infamous" Ljubo Miloš, commander of the Ustaša extermination camp Jasenovac, claiming that most of the members of the group committed war crimes in extermination camps.[116] *Borba* also transmitted the accusation of the general prosecutor, alleging, among other things, that the "Anglo-American occupation authorities in Austria and Italy, instead of extraditing war criminals and collaborationists to Yugoslavia, they held them in Displaced Persons camps

111 Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*, 144.

112 Ivan Prusac, *Tragedija Kavrana i drugova. Svjedočanstvo preživjelog* (Stuttgart: self-published, 1967), 215.

113 Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*, 149.

114 Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*, 150.

115 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 262, as quoted by Radelić, Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*, 150.

116 "Optuženi ustaše prebačeni su u našu zemlju kao agenti imperijalista radi vršenja terorističkih akata i špijunaže," *Borba*, July 13, 1948, 3-4.

in Italy [Camp Fermo first] and Austria, where they found refuge and could work against Yugoslavia, with the complicity of church officials from the Vatican circles," explicitly mentioning the Pontifical Croatian College of Saint Jerome and priest Krunoslav Draganović who helped in the hiding of "Ante Pavelić, Mate Frković, Mimo Rosandić, Danijel Crljen, Dušan Žanko, NDH minister Artuković, and the accused Ljubo Miloš and other Ustaša butchers." *Borba* went on to say how they were organizing and financing the infiltration of Ustaša groups into Yugoslavia, but also the escape of Ustaša war criminals to North and South America. They also counted with the complicity of Italian and Austrian "reactionary authorities."[117] Their goal was to overthrow Yugoslavia and reestablish the NDH. Although he was not the operation commander, Ljubo Miloš was the first accused of, among other things, aiding Ante Pavelić's crossing into Italy with a Peruvian passport.

After giving the accounts on which each of the defendants was accused, the reasoning of the accusation concludes:

> The role of the international reaction and the espionage of certain foreign countries in instigating, organizing, and infiltrating terrorist and espionage groups has been undoubtedly proven … The Vatican and high clerical officials, as well as a series of priests have played a key role in aiding the terrorists and spies that entered the country. One of the biggest crimes of the Catholic clergy in Croatia is massive conversion of Serbs into Catholic religion. The Ustaša priests are playing a significant role in gathering and aiding the Ustaša emigration and spreading anti-Yugoslav propaganda abroad, as well as infiltrating terrorist-espionage groups into Yugoslavia, all in accordance with and with the support of the Vatican.[118]

The same article stressed that documents gathered in the investigation also show how Ante Pavelić—with the intermediation of a person of trust by the Vatican, Krunoslav Draganović, and international agents—found refuge in the Allied zones of occupation in Austria and Italy, where he was still hiding. While one part of the emigration was going to South America, aided by the Vatican, the other part was in DP camps and monasteries. Also, two accused stated that the money for the escape of Ustaša from the prison in Rome (see chapter 2) was given by the friar Ivo Mandić.

117 Anti-socialist. According to Marxists Internet Archive Encyclopedia: "A political position that maintains a conservative response to change, including threats to social institutions and technological advances." https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/r/e.htm

118 "Optuženi ustaše prebačeni su u našu zemlju kao agenti imperijalista radi vršenja terorističkih akata i špijunaže," *Borba*, July 13, 1948, 4.

Borba regularly published information from the trial, the last one being on August 28, 1948, reporting that twenty accused were sentenced to death by hanging and twenty-three by shooting, with twelve sentenced to long prison sentences.[119] Meanwhile, the diaspora that had already settled in Argentina and started publishing their journal *Hrvatska* (Croatia), after the sentence and the execution of the Kavran group members, published an article in Croatian and Spanish titled, "Let Us Bow Before the Croatian Martyrs and Carry on with Their Oath," and in the subtitle "In Our Thoughts We Shall Accompany to Unknown Graves Forty-Three New Croatian Victims for Freedom. … The New Martyrs Will Bring Fruit for the Freedom of Croatia." The article states that it was an expected outcome, but also vows that the culprits for the demise of Operation April 10 would be known sooner or later, and that those who went back to the homeland were patriots who knew that they were risking their lives, and some had even refused to emigrate to Argentina. The article concludes, "This heroic vanguard has fallen, but the majority will know how to draw a lesson from this great sacrifice and know how to assess when the right moment comes and gather real strength for the final fight. And one day, on the Victory Day, the Homeland will pay homage to this vanguard publicly, while doing it clandestinely at the moment, as we do it from a distance, taking over from them the holy oath of the struggle for the Croatian State."[120]

At the beginning of the trial, the Croatian National Resistance movement (Hrvatski narodni odpor—HNO), also published an official statement on July 20, 1948, titled "From the HNO Ranks," written by Lovro Sušić, one of the coordinators of Operation April 10, portraying them as a group of enthusiasts who went there on their own will.[121] In that letter and subsequent others, they assumed the defeat and the impossibility of undertaking any further resistance activities. This was a hard blow and a sign to renounce from any attempt.

As with all the traumatic events that are the subject of this chapter, there was wide discussion of what happened and who was to blame. Many works were published, from both sides and perspectives, continuing into the 1990s and 2000s.[122] Here we are going to stress the perspective from the

119 "Izrečena je presuda ustaškim teroristima i špijunima u Zagrebu," *Borba*, July 28, 1948, 5.

120 "Poklonimo se mučenicima i nastavimo s njihovom zakletvom," *Croacia*, September 15, 1948, Year II, No. 18, 1.

121 Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj*, 151

122 *Terorističke i špijunske akcije protiv FNR Jugoslavije: otkrića sa zagrebačkog procesa protiv ustaške terorističko-špijunske grupe Kavran-Miloš* [Terrorist and spying actions against Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia: Discoveries from the Zagreb trial against Ustaša terrorist spy

point of view of the émigré community. In 1967, Vinko Nikolić published a book of interviews that he carried out in 1965 with members of the Croatian émigré community in Europe and others, including several key actors of Operation April 10.[123] Nikolić also gives his evaluation of the event, and expresses the need to "hold a judicial process abroad and establish who is guilty," since seventeen years had passed and the trial would not be held in Croatia in the foreseeable future, and it should be done before the witnesses would die without saying anything.[124] He reflects the collective trauma and victimhood narrative of the community regarding the Kavran group in his writing: "all these intellectual and political forces … Why did these chosen ones lose their lives so cheaply and brutally? They were defending their national convictions heroically and without fear."[125] He states that, "It is sad that only our enemies talk about this and other Croatian tragedies, and their main source is falsification and division."[126] Therefore, he concludes that: "There is a pressing need for us to have our say about the events of the war. We left it to the partisans, who have been speaking and writing the most disgusting things about us Croats for twenty years … I emphasize the need for us to finally have our say: to present our experiences and sufferings, to confess our sins and delusions—even our crimes—from which many wonderful Croatian idealists, who infinitely loved their homeland, would rise even more brilliantly."[127] As will be seen later in chapter 4, in the 1960s the émigré community started to turn to the world, after the first period when they were settling accounts among themselves and coming to terms with the defeat, exile, and their own responsibility. They tried to offer their version of events, establishing the dichotomy between Croats and Partisans, where some of them insisted that the Partisans were not Croats.

group Kavran-Miloš] (Zagreb: Društvo novinara NR Hrvatske, 1948); Goran Vuković, *Klopka za koljače* [Trap for the butchers] (Jasenovac: Spomen-područje, 1975); Dragan Marković et al., *Ratnici mira.* [Peace warriors] (Belgrade: Sloboda, 1979); Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*; Mate Frković, "Nepoznate stranice iz poslijeratnog djelovanja hrvatske emigracije" [Unknown pages from the postwar activities of Croatian emigration], *Hrvatska revija*, September 1971, Vol. 2–3; Mate Frković, "Svaki sa svojom dramom: jedno svjedočanstvo. Iz mojih političkih doživljaja" [Each with his own drama: A testimony. From my political experiences], *Hrvatska revija*, 1984, Vol. 3; Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*; Prusac, *Tragedija Kavrana*; Fra Martin Planinić, *Tko je izdao Kavrana* [Who betrayed Kavran] (Tomislavgrad: Tomislavgradske ratne novine TRN, 1994).

123 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*.

124 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 284.

125 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 183.

126 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 357.

127 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 280.

Nikolić interviewed the priest Krunoslav Draganović who qualified "the Kavran affair, probably the most difficult and most tragical in the history of our whole postwar emigration,"[128] and labeled Kavran as a "marvelous patriot and noble idealist."[129] Nikolić also interviewed Ivan Prusac, a member of the third group that entered Croatia on September 8, 1947, who emigrated after serving fifteen years in prison, and at that time was about to publish his book on the events.[130] In the interview Nikolić labeled him as "the surviving martyr, one of the survivors of the Kavran tragedy." In trying to establish the line of responsibility, Prusac claimed that Kavran was under the direct orders of Pavelić and that the intention was to create a bridge "between the emigration and the woods [referring to the guerrilla groups] and to renew the woods" and wait for the conflict between the Western Allies and Soviet Russia.[131] He also stated that they "had allies, some help and a lot of encouragement and promises. If the matter had succeeded, those allies of ours would have been seen, but when it ended tragically, everyone washed their hands, the allies skillfully escaped, and we were left alone."[132] He did not regret participating in the action, because it was his "duty as a Croatian soldier," but he did regret "how we fell right into the trap,"[133] and stated that "even today it is painful to remember how they got us."[134] When asked about the group's behavior at the trial, he said: "The vast majority were so amazingly heroic that the communists themselves were surprised, where did they get such mental and moral strength from. Once the details are known, it will be seen that these martyrs did not die in vain. Their demeanor at the time of arrest, their imprisonment under various tortures and in chains, their demeanor before the court, their behavior at the time of terrible convictions, their defiance even of death itself, so that the enemy would not humiliate them."[135] He portrayed Božidar Kavran as "a model of honesty, a model fighter, who trusted people too much, voluntarily went into death, so that his comrades would not think that he had betrayed them, an honorable, warm-hearted, solid character of a Croat, a Croatian hero and martyr."[136]

128 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 350.
129 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 354.
130 Prusac, *Tragedija Kavrana i drugova*.
131 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 276.
132 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 278.
133 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 276.
134 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 279.
135 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 279.
136 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 279.

Prusac also mentioned that he believed Srećko Rover had not betrayed the Kavran group.[137] Srećko Rover was a person of trust for Operation April 10 who transferred Kavran group members from Austria into Yugoslavia, but was publicly accused by Pavelić in 1956 that he was one of the Yugoslav agents who infiltrated the operation.[138] This was Pavelić's response to the statement by Rover from Australia who stated that Pavelić's time was over and that new forces should take over, and that Pavelić wanted to exclude Luburić from the Ustaša ranks. Luburić formed the HNO with Rover as his secretary general which, according to Pavelić, further fragmented the unity of the Ustaša abroad. In the letter, Pavelić dismissed General Luburić based on his resignation letter on December 7, 1955, and stated that he did not know Rover personally, but that "he was precisely the one who in the tragical case of Božo Kavran and comrades most eagerly convinced the people to go to the woods, falsely portraying that it was my wish," although he tried to convince Kavran not to go but it was already late.[139] Then Pavelić said that Rover transferred people across the border and delivered the groups to alleged Crusaders who turned out to be Yugoslav secret service agents, while he always turned back to Austria, even after the surrender of Kavran. He then claimed that he tried to warn Luburić that Rover was not to be trusted, but that Luburić opted to trust him more.[140]

According to Tokić, the real motive was the rift between Pavelić and Srećko Rover, Luburić's closest ally and the head of the Australian section of the Croatian Armed Forces, since "Rover fomented a dispute with Pavelić concerning the use of funds sent by him to Buenos Aires from Croatian émigrés in Australia and New Zealand. Essentially, Rover believed that such funds should be used for local anti-Yugoslav recruitment and agitation, rather than to line the already full pockets of the aging and, in his view, generally useless Ustaša old guard in Argentina. Pavelić, meanwhile, believed that it was Rover who was padding his bank account to the detriment of the greater cause of Croatian independence."[141] To clear his name, Rover voluntarily submitted himself to the court of honor that was held in May 1956 in Barcelona, and he was freed from every charge. Prusac, one of the Kavran group members, agreed that Rover was not a traitor. A year later, in 1957, Rover filed a libel suit in Australia against Stanko Ivanković for accusing him that he

137 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 282.

138 Ante Pavelić, "Nezavisna Država Hrvatska iznad svega," *Hrvatska—Croacia*, Buenos Aires, March 7, 1956, Year 10, No. 5, 3–4.

139 Pavelić, „Nezavisna Država Hrvatska iznad svega", 3-4.

140 Pavelić, „Nezavisna Država Hrvatska iznad svega", 3-4.

141 Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism*, 46.

"had handed Croat patriots to Communists for execution during post-war flighting against the Tito regime," and was awarded £500 in damages by the District Court of New South Wales. Judge Prior stated that "there could be no greater slur on the character of a patriot than to state openly he had handed his comrades in arms to the enemy for execution."[142]

Even though he did everything to clear his name, the suspicion was always there, as Neda Rosandić Šarić, the daughter of the Kavran group member Mime Rosandić also says in her memoirs:

> I heard about Srećko Rover in my childhood. His name was associated with suspicion of treason. The subject dragged on for several years among the émigré community, it was the cause of speculations and discussions. Mother also talked about Rover, of course she didn't know what was right and what wasn't. Rover was indeed under attack. For his part, he asked that his case be considered by an impartial committee. In May 1956, an court of honour met in Barcelona, whose members were prominent Croatian emigrants. They considered Rover's report and the statements of individual witnesses. They acquitted Srećko Rover of all guilt. Of course, doubt still lingered in the air.[143]

Rosandić Šarić, who exiled to Argentina as a child, also remembers that she saw Ante Pavelić in 1952 when her mother asked to speak to him on his visit to the Croatian community in Monte Street, Buenos Aires. After the conversation, her mother

> was visibly upset. I asked her what he said about dad. She replied that she didn't learn anything from him that she hadn't heard before. He distanced himself from the action … He probably considered it his duty to accept the conversation, because he respected my father, because he appreciated his Croatness and honesty. And also, out of respect for my mother, who enjoyed a reputation in our Croatian community. But the meeting was a disappointment for the mother … In the same way, certain other people had already fenced themselves off, who were certainly connected to the action itself and its participants. It is probably human to fence off afterwards. But it's not honorable.[144]

142 "£500 Damages for Accusation," *The Canberra Times*, June 28, 1957, 10.
143 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 146.
144 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 221.

Eventually, she concluded: "I do not blame anyone from the Croatian State Leadership for the death of my father and for the operation failure. It is clear who the enemies were. Among the Croats, only those who were traitors to their homeland should be considered guilty."[145] She was considered a child of a martyr and, although her memories are mixed with her mother's, she does remember that immediately after the failure of the action many people came to talk to her mother about her father, and when she heard them saying that he was irresponsible for leaving his wife and his daughters, she stood up and answered: "My Daddy went to defend Croatia!"[146]

This sense of martyrdom and victimization mixed with pride followed her throughout her life, together with the memory of the last time she saw her father at the river near Camp Fermo and the farewell letter that she found later in Buenos Aires, where her mother was hiding it, a message to his daughters Anera, Mara, and lka, saying, "For us the Homeland is above everything and we obey it … The Providence set that we have to protect, defend and preserve that piece of Croatian land for generations. This is why your Daddy could not do otherwise, and you, my dear girls, forgive me for leaving you orphans. Trust God, obey your mother and be faithful to Croatia until you die. Your Daddy, Mime."[147] In the community that perceived itself as a community of victims, there were bigger victims and martyrs who symbolized and confirmed their tragic destiny. Also, from childhood memories of a daughter of a martyr, we can read how trauma was transmitted, reinforced, whitewashed, and uncritically accepted.

The Ustaša Gold

During the withdrawal of the NDH government, the gold from the treasury was also withdrawn. However, as with the evacuation of families, the withdrawal of assets started well before the defeat. Uki Goñi states that since early 1944 the NDH

> had been placing large amounts of gold and liquid currency in safe accounts in Switzerland. By one estimate the Croatians managed to stash away 2,400 kilos of gold and other valuables in Berne before the end of the war. Two such transfers have been confirmed so far: 358 kilos of gold

145 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 222.
146 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 224.
147 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 243.

> were transferred to the Swiss National Bank in May 1944 and a further 980 kilos in August. … The Croatians had hoped to place these two large gold deposits under Nazi safe-keeping, a plan that failed when the Swiss National Bank refused to transfer the gold to Germany in October and again refused to transfer it back to Zagreb in December.[148]

The source is the US Department of State and US intelligence reports, which also state that in December 1944

> the Swiss National Bank refused the Croatian request for the return of the gold to Zagreb, and the Swiss Federal Council froze all Croatian assets in Switzerland. Swiss National Bank returned all 1,338 kilograms of gold in 121 ingots in the account of the wartime Croatian regime to the National Bank of Yugoslavia on July 24, 1945, in response to the request of the new Yugoslav Government. US intelligence became aware that transfers of some sort were going on by the end of 1944. The OSS Mission in Bern reported that 500 kilograms of gold bars ($562,500) with German markings had been brought to Switzerland from Zagreb, and the Croat State Bank had deposited 2.5 million Swiss francs ($580,000) in another account in Switzerland According to still other reports, up to as much as 500 kilograms of gold (more than $560,000) were carried to Austria at the end of the war, with Pavelić's knowledge.[149]

Adriano and Cingolani state that first a large amount of assets were deposited in Swiss banks in 1944–45, and when the NDH leadership fled Zagreb a total of forty-six boxes of gold bars and coins together with jewels went into two directions: the first thirty-two boxes were hidden in a Zagreb monastery where they stayed until Jan 25, 1946, with the complicity of Franciscan Provincial Modesto Martinčić.[150] They were seized by the Yugoslav security service, the Department for the Protection of the People (Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda—OZNA). The same is confirmed by Basta.[151] Another fourteen cases left for Austria together with eighteen boxes of a philatelic collection from the Zagreb post administration.

148 Goñi, *The Real Odessa*, 390.

149 US Department of State, "The Fate of the Wartime Ustasha Treasury," accessed on June 25, 2025, https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/rpt_9806_ng_ustasha.pdf.

150 Pino Adriano and Giorgio Cingolani, *Nationalism and Terror: Ante Pavelić and Ustasha Terrorism from Fascism to the Cold War* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018).

151 Basta, *Rat je završen sedam dana kasnije*, 269–70.

The most detailed account of what happened with that part of gold is given in Croatian by Jere Jareb.[152] The amount was fourteen cases, in total 290 kilos of gold, plus another case with money, such as German Reichsmarks, Italian liras, and jewels.[153] Out of fourteen cases, two were taken by Mirko Puk,[154] while another one was divided among the top officials, and supposedly already taken from Puk before even entering Austrian territory.

Surprised by a Partisan ambush, the drivers abandoned the trucks with the philatelic collection, which was lost forever, but eleven boxes (around 250 kilos) were eventually hidden near a monastery in Wolfsberg. Then two boxes were taken by the priest Krunoslav Draganović to Rome,[155] and the rest was transported to Radstadt by Frane Šarić upon orders by Pavelić, but later Šarić and general Ante Moškov took the gold somewhere else and only they and Marko Čavić knew its whereabouts. It seems that general Moškov took a certain amount and gave one part to Božidar Kavran, while Marko Čavić took the rest of the gold (estimated between 140 and 170 kilos) to Italy and then to Argentina, together with Josip and Ivica Tomljenović.

The issue of the NDH gold taken to exile is also mentioned in the Commission for the Clarification of the Arrival of Nazis (Comisión Para el Esclarecimiento del Arribo de Nazis a la Argentina—CEANA) report,[156] mostly drawing from Jareb. There have been numerous speculations around the issue, and this is not really the object of this book, but the issue of gold and who took it has been a recurrent topic among the Croatian political émigré community throughout years. Many wanted to clean their reputation from the "yellow fever," meaning the destiny of what they called "the rescued Croatian state property." Such is the case of NDH minister Lovro Sušić, who in his letter on June 20, 1949 gave a thorough account of what happened with a total of twelve cases of gold and a box of jewelry that was stored near the monastery of Wolfsberg.[157]

When many émigrés settled in Argentina with the NDH political and military leadership, a leaflet, "The Truth About Croatian Gold," was distributed

152 Jareb, *Zlato i novac NDH*.

153 Jareb, *Zlato i novac NDH*, 350.

154 Mirko Puk, NDH minister of justice, appointed by the NDH government as extraordinary appointee of the Croat central bank, head of the commission for state treasure deposited in the bank.

155 About Draganović, see chapter 4.

156 Dennis Reinhartz, "Huida de los Ustasha a la Argentina después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial," in *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de las Actividades Nazis en la Argentina—CEANA, Informe final* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1999), 200–204.

157 Jareb, *Zlato i novac NDH*, 312.

in Argentina in 1950, and signed by "a group of Croatian patriots" warning the émigré community that, while they were sacrificing and contributing to the cause and living in miserable conditions, those who were holding Croatian state gold (250 kg and 1100 carats of diamonds) as if they were their private property were living a luxurious life and investing it in companies and financial operations.[158] The leaflet openly accused Pavelić, Godina, Tomljenović, and Čavić of holding onto the gold and especially Pavelić for giving the gold to his banking consultant Ivo Heinrich (a Zagreb Jew, and not a Croat, as stressed in the leaflet), who was building a factory in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. The leaflet also implicated other high officials paid for by Pavelić: Ivica Frković, Vjekoslav Vrančić, Oskar Turina, and Jozo Dumandžić, and stated that they should be punished for robbery and treason and warned the émigrés not to walk like "horses with blinkers," urging them to open their eyes.[159]

According to Rosandić Šarić, at the beginning of exile it was a big issue, but the only thing that she remembers, since she was a child at that time, was that there were discussions about who oversaw the gold before it disappeared. She names Sušić as the only one who was authorized to make key political decisions in the immediate aftermath of the war, the gold included, assigning a part to Draganović to aid Croatian refugees in Italy and Austria. She adds that General Vilko Pečnikar wanted to dispose with the money for political purposes.[160] Pečnikar and Sušić, according to Rosandić Šarić, appointed a supervisory committee for the distribution of assets, and Pečnikar suggested her father Rosandić be in charge, which he refused. Also, as told by her mother, her father was also offered to go from Camp Fermo to Rome to get some of the gold as one of the officials (he was supposed to get ninety ducats), but he refused, because the other people were starving, adding: "I prefer an honest reputation than a golden belt."[161] This

158 Jareb, *Zlato i novac NDH*, 342, footnote 107, attributes the authorship to Dr. Stijepo Perić, who was NDH foreign affairs minister from November 1943 to the end of April 1944. He was fired by Pavelić and went to Switzerland and then Austria and then in 1945 to Italy and eventually to Argentina in 1947, where he died in 1954. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 317.

159 Jozo Dumandžić was NDH wartime minister with several portfolios, including rural economy, justice and worship, transport and public works; Ivica Frković was NDH minister of forestry and mining; Turina held various high positions in the NDH ministry of foreign affairs, and worked in NDH embassies in Berlin and Vienna, from where he went into exile in 1945. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 105–106.

160 Pečnikar is wrongly named by Uki Goñi in *The Real Odessa* as Pavelić's son-in-law, an error reproduced by Adriano and Cingolani, mistaking him for Srećko Pšeničnik, husband of Mirjana Pavelić.

161 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 85.

was a source of special pride for the daughter, although they suffered a lot since her widowed mother came to Argentina without any assets.

The Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires's 1972 report also mentions the stolen gold from Yugoslavia and gives a list of people who were known to have brought gold to Argentina.[162] As it occurs with gold and hidden treasures, the issue of the "Ustaša gold" or "Croatian state property," as it is called by the NDH top officials, was a recurrent topic, not only among the émigré community, but also well into 1990s in Croatia. For instance, in 1997 *Globus* weekly published a piece on new information on "the Ustaša gold.[163] And, as Jareb rightfully concludes in his exhaustive book: "One thing is sure, all the gold, jewels, and foreign currency ended in the hands of Croats in exile who spent it."[164] And that was an apple of discord in the community.

Conclusion

The defeat, the exit from Croatia, the repatriation, the Kavran group, and Bleiburg, all this weaves a weft of the trauma and the cornerstone of the victimhood narrative of the Croatian political émigré community. Even decades later, both children and adults preserved vivid and detailed memories of the events and moments when they had to leave their homes, as well as their exile routes, showing how the immediate aftermath of the defeat in 1945, their year zero, was a strong trauma that left an indelible mark on them and made it possible to, in the case of adults, erase or disregard all the earlier memories of the crimes and atrocities committed by the NDH regime that they participated in or supported, and create a foundational myth of themselves as (exclusively) victims. This chapter covered those who were either repatriated to Yugoslavia or managed to flee through different exile routes or the so-called ratlines. But most of the political émigré community, before reaching Argentina, spent several years in DP camps, another mark on their traumatic memory and victimhood narrative. The next chapter treats the passage through DP camps, particularly the Fermo camp in Italy.

162 The list includes Ivo Rojnica, Milivoj Hotko, Viktor Makar, Ivan Garac, Lukas Juričić, Tomiša Grgić, Zvonko Mikan, Ivica Perčević, Drago Žubrinić, Josip Pavičić, prof. Ivo Porić, Riki Pažur, Edo Magaš, Mate Frković, dr. Linke, Marija Rukavina, and others. DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, 1972 Annual Report, December 1972, 5/515–516.

163 As quoted by Jareb, *Zlato i novac NDH*, 355, footnote 116: Vlado Vurušić, "Novo svjedočanstvo o ustaškom zlatu. Razgovor s Ljudevitom Konja u Torontu, Kanada," *Globus*, August 22, 1997, 34–37.

164 Jareb, *Zlato i novac NDH*, 356.

2. “Il Piccolo Stato Croato”: The Allied Displaced Persons Camp Fermo in Italy

Abstract: The bulk of the Croatian émigrés passed through the displaced persons camps, and the only exclusive Croatian camp was Fermo. The second chapter studies the start of a decades-long exile, reconstructing life in the camp and its symbolic place in the formation of the Croatian political émigré community in Argentina. Finally, the chapter also shows the flip side—the parts that were erased from the Croatian diaspora’s memory because they were not instrumental to their narrative or because they contradicted it.

Keywords: refugees, camps, exile, counter memory

As said in the previous chapter, the majority of those who escaped fate in Bleiburg and fled from Yugoslavia were first detained in the Western Allies’ DP camps in western Germany, Austria, and Italy and eventually found a haven overseas. According to the People’s Republic of Croatia State Security Service report on “Enemy activities of the Yugoslav political emigration in (and outside) the camps in some European countries, mostly Italy and Austria,” by mid-1946, the Croatian emigration was mostly settled in camps in Austria (Spittal, Salzburg, Lienz, Villach, Klagenfurt, Murdorf, St. Veit, Graz, Kellenberg, Leibniz), with a total number of 3,934 persons, and Italy (Modena, Fermo, Taranto, Grim, Eboli, Jezy, Trieste, and Rome), with a total number of 5,529.[1] Before arriving in the DP camps, they also passed through the transit camps in Tarvisio, Bologna, Reggio Emilia, and Palombina near

1 “Neprijateljska djelatnost jugoslavenske političke emigracije u logorima (i izvan njih) nekih europskih zemalja, prije svega u Italiji i Austriji,” HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH 1561/ I.1-1., 5–6.

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-3

Ancona. A smaller number of refugees settled in Germany, France, and even Asia Minor and Egypt.

The largest Croatian camp in Italy was Campo Fermo, near the town of Ascoli Piceno in the Marche region. It was initially a tannery, established in 1938, but it did not operate as such for long. In 1942, it became the fascist camp PG70 (Campo di Prigionia 70), where mostly British, New Zealander, and South African prisoners from the wars in Africa were held. After World War II, the camp became DP camp no. 8, with a capacity of around 3,000 persons, administered by the division of refugees and repatriation of the Allied Command. It was mostly Croatian DPs who were held in the camp. It functioned as a Croatian DP camp from 1945 to 1947, when most of the refugees settled in Argentina. In 1956, it was reopened as a tannery under the name of Sacomar and operated until 2003, when it was closed. As Karlo Mirth describes it, "the camp consisted of seventeen huge high concrete buildings situated behind the food storehouse. The entrance to the camp was in a form of a nicely constructed architectonic parabola, so when we would talk or write about the life in the camp, we would use the phrase 'behind the parabola.'"[2]

Here we shall examine how the exiles experienced and remembered their life "behind the parabola." The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct life in the camp based on their memoirs and deconstruct its symbolic place in the formation of the Croatian political émigré community in Argentina. The last section of this chapter will deconstruct the memory of Camp Fermo and offer alternative views by some members of the diaspora and rescue the parts that were left out because they contradicted the dominant, romanticized view.

A Little Croatian Town in Italy

Since Fermo was almost exclusively a Croatian DP camp,[3] it became "the leader of all of the Croatian emigration since it gave refuge to the largest number of intellectuals who later became the leaders of the emigration."[4] Mirth states that Fermo "was a small Croatian oasis of Croatian cultural-national work that in those circumstances and at that time had a huge

2 Karlo Mirth, *Život u emigraciji* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2003), 27.

3 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH 1561/ I.1–1., 117, Eng. Josip Jezovšek-August 1946.

4 Delo in življenje hrvatskog emigrantskog logora u Italiji [The work and life of Croatian emigrant camp in Italy], Inv. 321, File no. 3221–10, Jezovšek (August 1948), Slovenian National Archive.

political importance, which caused the Yugoslav government to send numerous and categorical protests and requests for extradition of refugees. This prominent role of Fermo was not a coincidence. Here, a lot of educated people found themselves gathered, including experts in different fields."[5] According to the civilian head of the camp, Dušan Žanko,[6] Fermo was "a typical sociological phenomenon of the postwar, containing thousands of uprooted lives, truncated activities, broken existences, lost ambitions and tragic destinies."[7]

The first group of Croats arrived at Fermo "on the second day of the feast of St. Paul and Peter, that is, 30 June 1945, with one of our priests. One hall was immediately transformed into a chapel, and the very next day, on Sunday, a Mass was celebrated. Soon the other groups of Croats came. They said: from now on this will be your permanent camp. The chapel soon became the center of the camp and the center of religious life."[8] The very arrival at Fermo stayed in the memory of the Croats, especially the children. Those who arrived as children remember the trip vividly: "We were going from one camp to another, eight days here, three months there, four months in a third place … The boys composed a song: '*Attenzione, attenzione*, eat your *maccaroni*, hop on the *wagoni*, and go to Bologna.'"[9] "At a train station, the soldiers did not allow people to approach us, we looked like lepers. When we arrived, they shaved our heads and disinfected us with a powder, I think it was DDT."[10] "The first night was horrible, we arrived in a terrible state, they washed us with kerosene."[11]

Neda Rosandić Šarić, who spent her earliest childhood in the camp, draws from her mother's memories as if they were her own:

> As groups of Croats arrived, they were instructed to line up for disinfection, they were not even allowed a break to eat. They separated the women from the men and demanded that they all strip down to their

5 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 37.

6 Žanko was head of the Croatian State Theatre from 1941 to 1943 and then diplomatic representative of the NDH before Vichy France. Zdravko Dizdar et al., eds., *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 433–34.

7 Dušan Žanko, "Campo Fermo," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXVIII, No. 135, October 1997, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/135/135.htm.

8 Kazimir Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede: Povijest hrvatske političke emigracije 1945–1990*, 3 vols. (Zagreb: Naklada Trpimir, 2017), 89.

9 Interview with T.K. (born 1935), member of the 1.5 generation, September 10, 2018.

10 Cristian Sprljan, *Campo Fermo: Historia de los refugiados croatas en Italia: 1945–1948* (Córdoba: Brujas, 2014), 20.

11 Carmen Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Krivodol Press, 2004), 48.

> naked body, to immediately spray them with the pesticide DDT, smeared and sweaty. The mother moved to the end of the line and asked to take a shower first. And in front of her was a sad scene of naked women about to be sprayed. The image of the old Mrs. Došen, the widow of the prominent member of the Starčević party,[12] and her daughter, remained particularly sad in her memory. The daughter was leading the old mother under her arm. My mother was struck by the scene as a severe case of disrespect for human dignity. She herself bravely refused the spraying, and managed to get in the shower, and later to get a more decent form of disinfection. Women who were directly sprayed pesticides on their bodies, smeared and sweaty from the long journey, got open wounds that were later difficult to heal.[13]

These wounds were not only physical, as we can read from the memoirs of adults and children who passed through Fermo and other camps, and the children retell the stories of humiliation vividly, as if these memories were their own, showing how strong the intergenerational transmission of memory was on the 1.5 generation. By the end of July 1945, when new groups of Croats arrived, the first elections for Croatian administration of the camp were held, under the supervision of a small group of English people: one officer, two to three subofficers and two women from the British Red Cross, that is, a mere five to six people. As more people came, elections were held regularly so that everyone was represented.[14]

A great number of Croats arrived on August 15, 1945, "a mass of people that was, since 15 May,[15] pulled and pushed, scared, hungry, humiliated and depersonalized in improvised refugee camps in Italy. A mass that, with every day that passed, was losing its normal physiognomy of a civilized community and getting drowned in a monotonous lost mass of what used to be persons."[16] Luka Brajnović gives a similar account of the situation: "Those were the times when tragedies accumulated, and when living corpses were parading in all the directions, still carrying on their faces the terrible

12 Her husband was Marko Došen, member of the first Ustaša emigration in 1930s, president of the NDH era Croatian state parliament, even after the parliament was dismissed (1942–44, when he died). Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 95–96.

13 Neda Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega—Moj otac Mime Rosandić* (Čitluk: Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Čitluku, 2021), 66.

14 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 27.

15 This was the date of the attempt of surrender to the Allies at Bleiburg, Austria.

16 Žanko, "Campo Fermo."

horrors of a furious, brutal and terrible war that had just ended."[17] The Croats were totally demoralized after the defeat, the escape from Yugoslavia and the killings, and were physically and psychologically exhausted from being constantly resettled in one camp after another. As Brajnović remembers, they were always transported "in cattle wagons … as if nobody thought of us as persons, just as any load."[18] As their memoirs testify, the exiles were still in shock from months-long traumatic experiences, but found comfort in faith and devotion to God, one of the salient characteristics of this community of political exiles, which was perpetuated in their narrative over time and generations to follow. This dispirited phase lasted until the first Christmas in the camp, when the people at the camp "gathered around a large Christmas tree to pray for the repose of our dead who died for the homeland and to give thanks to God that we were alive after five years of war. The Christmas songs were the best prayer on that cold Christmas."[19] According to Ivo Rojnica, it was their "first 'black Christmas' when everyone was in low spirits, thinking of the tragic times lived during the year."[20] On the other hand, Mirth recalls that the Fermo Croats celebrated their first Christmas as refugees with a lot of dignity and that everyone shook hands or hugged firmly. He also states that their feeling of closeness to the Christmas spirit was reinforced by the fact that they slept on straw mattresses, similar to the nativity scene.[21] All the above-mentioned memories reflect the collective, dominant victimization narrative that they adopted.

Hence, at Christmas in 1945, the Croatian refugees at Fermo faced defeat and loss. But it was also a turning point for their community because it "concentrated together and faced with itself, became aware of the terrible abyss of the mystical loss of the homeland, the separation of

17 Luka Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros: Memorias de la guerra y el exilio* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2000), 86. Luka Brajnović was a professor at the Institute for Sociology in Zagreb from 1943 to 1945, later exiled to Spain where he was a renown cultural worker and professor at the University of Navarra, Pamplona.

18 Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros*, 85.

19 Cristian Sprljan, "Historia de la inmigración croata en Córdoba," *Studia croatica* 44, no. 146 (2004).

20 Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2 vols. (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1983), 2:79. Ivo Rojnica was a Ustaša movement member since 1939, and, since the establishment of the NDH, Ustaša commissioner for Dubrovnik until November 1941 when he transferred to the Armed Forces intelligence services. In 1943 he got the rank of colonel in the Ustaša army. After fleeing Croatia, he settled in Argentina where he was a businessman in the textile industry (see later in the book). Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 349. He was accused of war crimes against Jews, and Serbs in 1941 while he was NDH commissioner for Dubrovnik, but he was never tried.

21 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 29.

families and the abandonment of homes."[22] Throughout the memories of their collective trauma, we can see that there are a lot of biblical and religious references: the exodus, the Way of the Cross, Christmas spirit, and now this alleged mystical loss of homeland, which for them ceased to exist because they no longer inhabited it. It was obviously a shock and a trauma, but there was nothing mystical about it. Croatia did not cease to exist because they left it or because it formed part of Yugoslavia, as it did since 1918—except for during World War II when it was a Nazi puppet state, divided into German and Italian protectorates, so even then it was not independent. But in their memoir, written in retrospect, they reinterpret the events from the present and give them a higher meaning to justify their cause and raison d'être. This goes in line with another biblical reference, the one of the chosen people that had to suffer until they returned to their homeland.

Luka Brajnović, who later found refuge in Spain, shared his compartment with the former rector of the University of Zagreb, Stjepan Horvat,[23] who once told him: "We have to overcome all this quashing, annulment and passivity. It is urgent to promote different activities, from sports to arts."[24] And it was indeed that way. In the face of tragedy, faith emerged and soon Campo Fermo was animated by a new spirit: "Suddenly, everything was in movement, simply and naturally everyone found his/her place and started working in his/her profession."[25]

First, they tidied up the camp and reorganized the halls: they replaced straw beds with ones made of iron and wood, refurbished the partition walls between families and organized a kitchen for 2,000 to 2,500 persons. Those who were engineers by profession started fixing the camp and built a swimming pool. In the camp chapel that had been installed in the center of the camp, Ante Turzan painted a portrait of the mother of God, and under it the Croatian coat of arms with the inscription *Advocata Croatiae Fidelissima* [most faithful attorney for the Croats]. "At the camp chapel our craftsmen made beautiful shiny chandeliers out of cans, that everyone admired."[26] They obtained a bell from the Archbishop of Fermo for the chapel and Cardinal

22 Žanko, "Campo Fermo."

23 Stjepan Horvat was a geodesist and professor at the Technical Faculty of the University Zagreb, and rector of the University of Zagreb (1944–45). He emigrated to Argentina where he pursued a fruitful academic career (see later in the book).

24 Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros*, 86.

25 Žanko, "Campo Fermo."

26 Nedjeljka Luetić-Tijan, *Život Pavla Tijana* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2014), 121.

Ernesto Ruffini even paid a visit. They also started organizing pilgrimages to the local sanctuary of Our Lady of Loreto.[27]

Soon the Croats established a kindergarten, a primary school, and a secondary school, as well as language courses. Pavao Tijan made the education program "whose expedients were later recognized by the Italian State, a magnificent chorus, excellent conferences (a good portion of the camp population were intellectuals), a sort of a cantina and a 'ballroom.'"[28] They also established a crafts district, a mechanical repair shop,[29] and a cigarette factory that sold cigarettes all over central Italy, including Rome.[30] "There were different craftsmen. One seamster and his wife made good coats out of American woolen blankets. Girls, mostly university students, bought buttons, colored ribbons, laces and used them to decorate their dresses. Since they were young and pretty, it was nice to see that they managed to dress up even in times of necessity."[31] They also organized boy scouts. The central point in the camp was the public opinion square, where newspapers with important announcements and news were displayed on the wall. Luka Brajnović and Hasan Šuljak were in charge of the information service, editing a daily information bulletin, *Vijesti* (News), that Brajnović typed on an old typewriter, recollecting news that he heard on some radio programs (mainly the BBC, which was transmitting a lot of information from Yugoslavia) on a radio taken from a car that the English expropriated from one of the emigrants that was driving around Italy on his own.[32] They also "asked and got news from Croats in other camps, and also from the most recent refugees from the homeland. This is how they got the news about the extradition of Croats to Tito, about the Bleiburg tragedy. They thought that they were safe from extraditions in Fermo, but they were wrong."[33]

They would put the news on the billboard in the camp center that was also used by the camp commander to publish his orders. Some months later,

27 Sprljan, "Historia de la inmigración."

28 Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros*, 86. Pavao Tijan worked as a member of the editorial team of the *Croatian Enciclopedia* at the Croatian Publishing and Bibliographic Institute during the NDH. From 1944 to May 1945, he was head of higher education and scientific institutions at the ministry of education of the NDH. He emigrated to Spain where he worked at the Spanish National Research Council on Spanish encyclopedic publications, and was editor in chief of a Croatian radio program at the National Radio of Spain (1956–75). Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 397–98.

29 Žanko, "Campo Fermo."

30 Sprljan, "Historia de la inmigración."

31 Luetić-Tijan, *Život Pavla Tijana*, 121.

32 Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros*, 86.

33 Luetić-Tijan, *Život Pavla Tijana*, 121.

they got a printing machine from the Red Cross through an English officer for the daily bulletin.[34] Later, a printing house called Velebit was launched and published journals: on Christmas 1946, the first issue of the cultural-political newspaper *Croatia* was issued, and in February 1947 the religious journal *Ave advocata fidelissima Croatiae* appeared,[35] as well as *Hrvatski skaut*, the magazine of the Croatian scouts.[36] According to a statement under interrogation by Vilim Peroš and Josip Jezovšek, they were receiving aid from the Confraternity of Saint Jerome in Rome and from the Croatian community from the US that was used for paying the teachers.[37] The scouts and their excursions to the beach and the Apennines were financed by the British, while Brother Dominik Mandić donated 59,000 Italian liras for the press which enabled the issuing of the *Croatia* weekly, and then *Ave advocata*.

The *Croatia*, a "non-party cultural and political journal of Croatian refugees, published by the Committee of Croatian émigrés in the town of Fermo, Marche, Italy" was the only printed newspaper of Croatian refugees.[38] The first issue, published on Christmas 1946, was titled "Second Christmas in the Camp," and authored, even though not signed, by Dušan Žanko,[39] reflecting the spirit of the camp inhabitants:

> It is the second Christmas in the camp already. In the Christmas composure of our heart a horrible unrest and a terrible injustice are trembling …. We are the orphans of the world. We don't have our homeland anymore—what kind of an injustice is that? Most of us don't have our families—an even greater injustice! We don't have ourselves, our jobs, our dignified work, our bread—isn't this the peak of injustice? … Our second Christmas in the Camp is our second cry for peace and justice. It is, again, the oldest and deepest historical wish of our people. We are becoming the embodiment of that Croatian prayer in accordance with the prayer of Christmas liturgy: 'Let there be justice!' … This holds us and gives us strength.[40]

34 Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros*, 86.

35 It was launched by "Father Ošini," the Fermo pastor Viktor Vincens, known for repeating a saying, "Ošini po prašini" (literally, "Hit the dust," because there was a lot of dust in the camp, but the real meaning is to have no mercy), while biking around the camp. Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 42. The journal continued to be published in Argentina, where Vincens settled later.

36 Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede*, vol. 1.

37 HR–HDA–1561, SDS, RSUP SRH/ I.1–1, 13, 125.

38 *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica*, No. 2, January 1947.

39 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 30.

40 "Drugi Božić u logoru," *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica*, No. 1, December 25, 1946, 1–2.

Again, Žanko insists that they were innocent victims of the greatest injustice since they lost their homeland, asking for peace and justice, portraying all the Croats as peaceful and justice-loving people, erasing what the "lost homeland"—if he was referring to the NDH—was based on: racial laws, atrocities, and extermination.

The journal *Croatia* was published twice a month until the end of 1947. The newspaper laid the groundwork for later publishing activities in exile, especially in Argentina: it offered political analysis related to their status, reviewed the role of the NDH in World War II from their point of view, commented on news from Yugoslavia, world events, and other newspaper articles, and had a culture and literary section. *Croatia* showed that, as early as 1946, Croatian refugees were well connected, politically involved and informed about life outside the camp; it also showed that already at the camp they found their mission in exile as political émigrés: "to uncover the lies and defamation sent to the world by our enemies … to raise the spirit and to knock on the conscience of cultured humanity by seeking justice for our captured CROATIA,"[41] meaning to pursue their goal and advocate for their cause, in their view a just cause of victims who were turning to civilized people like them for help.

A Croatian surgeon at the camp performed "more than one hundred surgeries" and the lawyers wrote a statute regarding the organization of the camp, which was left in their hands by the British commander. They also formed some kind of parliament "to show that we the Croats are a democratic and parliamentarian people."[42] Moreover, the exiles started their commemoration tradition: from the arrival at Fermo, they began commemorating April 10, 1941, the date of the foundation of the NDH, and May 15, 1945, the date of the Bleiburg postwar killings. This tradition has persisted until the present day in Argentina, as will be seen later. In 1946, several former Ustaša officers, Josip Braco Tomljenović, Krešo Župan, Blaž Jurković, and Ivica Gržeta, started working on Operation April 10 and recruiting people. Mime Rosandić was the liaison between the group and Lovro Sušić, the president of the Croatian State Leadership in charge of the operation.[43]

In 1945, the Croatian Sports Club *Croatia* was founded, with a football team that played around ten matches inside the camp and even a few matches

41 "Obaviest uredničtva," *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica*, No. 18, October 1, 1947, 2.

42 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2:74.

43 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 84.

against local Italian teams. Croatia won their first match against the local football club Fermano; as a prize, they were given a piece of bread and soup. They also won against the British Army team by eight to one. In 1946, Ascoli Piceno took five members from Croatia as backups and won the University Cup. After leaving the camp, one Croat, Drago Lužić, started playing for Bolzano, a professional football team in the Italian League.[44] As we can read in testimonies, all of the elements of the jigsaw puzzle of the political émigrés' memory of Fermo served to portray Croatian political exiles as a peaceful and civilized community that communicated well with the local society and the camp command, with the Croats being treated and respected as equals.

In September 1945, the Pozornica Hrvata Izbjeglica (PHI) (Croatian Refugee Theatre) was formed. In the memoirs of the community of Croatian political émigrés, this was a solid testament to how cultural and highly civilized they were as a nation. One of the halls in the middle of the camp was allocated for cultural events and the Croats constructed a stage of 9 x 7 meters, with all the modern amenities: a Wagner curtain, a ramp, stage and theatre lighting, scenery, a whisperer cabin, etc. The PHI immediately began to stage short comedies, burlesques, parodies, dances, and so on. As the memoirs of émigrés stress, everything was staged from memory, because they did not have written material, which demonstrated how cultured they were. Later, the PHI translated and staged plays by Anton Chekhov, Dario Niccodemi, Molière, and Alexandre Dumas, as well as some Croatian authors such as Milan Begović. The PHI also organized a total of forty-five concerts, dances, and literary events, attended by the refugees, but also by Italians. In addition, an orchestra was soon formed. Due to its high artistic caliber, it was widely known and hosted by many Italian towns in the area. On the second anniversary of the theatre, a piece was published in *Croatia* saying that: "Croats, as a cultural national group, started to look intensely for new ways to organize their life in the imposed circumstances and satisfy their cultural needs. … As our group abounded with people who expressed themselves in different fields of culture back home, each of them tried to contribute to our national group … which resulted in the different perception and treatment of our national group by the Allied military authorities and by Italians, who are proud of us and stress that we are the most cultured refugee group in Italy."[45]

44 Marin Sopta, *Sveto ime Croatia: hrvatski nogometni klubovi 'Croatia' u iseljeništvu* (Zagreb: Udruga Hrvatska Dijaspora, 2008), 17.

45 VP, "Kronika logora Fermo–Dvie godine PHI," *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica*, No. 11 (June 15, 1947): 12.

Another cultural institution, the Choir of Croatian refugees of Camp Fermo, later renamed the Croatian Choir Jadran (Adriatic), was founded in 1945 and has remained active in Argentina up to the present day. Jadran's place in the memory of the Croatian community of political exiles in Argentina was highlighted in a speech at the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the choir: "As well as their struggle for life, bread, building homes and families, these people immediately started their cultural work, an irrefutable fact that shows the readiness and need of Croatian people for a cultural life."[46] Upon its foundation, Jadran had 110 members, "since the majority of the members had previous choir experience, they soon prepared a repertoire, all written by memory, since they did not bring sheet music."[47] It put on high-quality performances, but it was also a powerful tool of propaganda. Its greatest achievement was its presentation on the Vatican Radio on April 24, 1946, and a concert three days later for twenty-two nations where they performed for the first time "*Naša pjesma*" (Our song), a sort of "emigrant's anthem."

Doba je teško, Hrvatska nam strada	These are hard times, Croatia is suffering,
Dušmanin nad njom kali svoju žuč,	The enemy is outpouring his might.
Al mi smo mladi i prepuni nada,	But we are young and full of hope,
Uztrajne borbe nosimo luč.	We carry the torch of a persistent fight.
Misao sveta pređa nas vodi	A holy thought is our guide
Da robstvu strašnom bude jednom kraj	To finally end this horrible slavery,
Da dom nam sine u staroj slobodi	To see our home shining in old freedom,
Da nam se vrati stare slave sjaj.	To get back the shine of ancient glory.
Razvijmo barjak crven, bijeli plavi,	Let us wave the red, white, and blue flag,
Put neba silni dignimo glas,	And rise our voices towards the sky.
Koji nek cielom svietu tom dojavi	That should tell the whole world
Da Hrvatska živi dok ima nas!	That Croatia lives while we are alive!

After singing on the radio, the choir was received by Pope Pius XII. Dušan Žanko gave him the book *Martyrium Croatiae*, explaining the reasoning behind the Croatian nation's right to its own state.[48] "It was the first book of

46 José Holub, *25th Anniversary of the Croatian Choir Jadran—celebration booklet* (1972), http://www.studiacroatica.org/museum/0049/0049.htm.

47 Jadran 60th anniversary speech, http://www.studiacroatica.org/museum/0155/015503.htm.

48 Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede*, 91.

political nature published by Croatian émigrés in a foreign, Latin language. It was destined to Catholic circles in Rome and in the world. It kicked up a lot of dust and it was widely attacked by the communists," said Krunoslav Draganović,[49] who added that the structure of the book was drafted by Ivan Oršanić and Petar Bareza, with a series of collaborators who worked throughout the autumn of 1945 and a part of the winter of 1946.[50] One of the collaborators was Pavao Tijan who wrote five chapters for the book.[51] This event was also a part of the accusation against the Kavran group in 1948, mentioning that "the Ustaša criminals in Camp Fermo organized a singing choir which held a concert before the Vatican audience and on Vatican Radio and was later received by the Pope in the Vatican, who expressed his fatherly care and gave them his blessing."[52]

Mirth also mentions that on October 3, 1945, they founded Croatian Academic Club Fermo (HAK—Hrvatski akademski klub Fermo), and a month later the cultural institution Matica hrvatska (Matrix Croatica), which held lectures on political, cultural, and economic issues on Tuesdays and Fridays. The HAK held lectures and literary evenings for its members and its activities intertwined with Matica's.[53] In June 1946, Matica held a meeting with all the representatives of camp associations and institutions to organize work on documenting the four years of the NDH, the list of casualties and the wounded.[54]

The HAK also founded a literary section and in 1946 celebrated its first anniversary with an exhibition on Ivan Dragišić (real name Zdravko Dučmelić) and a "Soiree of lyrical poetry written by thirteen authors" from a manuscript "Lyrical Poetry 46."[55] The manuscript consisting of forty-six poems by sixteen authors was never published as a book (the project was

49 Draganović was an Ustaša colonel during the NDH era. He had been sent to Rome in 1943 to serve officially as secretary of San Girolamo degli Illirici, a Croatian seminary college. Unofficially, Draganović acted as Pavelić's representative to the Holy See. In the half decade following the end of World War II, Draganović became the leading organizational figure in the escape from Europe, not only of Croatian Ustaša leaders but also of German Nazis and other east European quislings. Mate Nikola Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism During the Cold War* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020), 26.

50 Vinko Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 2 vols. (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1967), 327.

51 Luetić-Tijan, *Život Pavla Tijana*, 122.

52 "Optuženi ustaše prebačeni su u našu zemlju kao agenti imperijalista radi vršenja terorističkih akata i špijunaže," *Borba*, July 13, 1947, 3.

53 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 38.

54 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 40.

55 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 47. Zdravko Dučmelić was a surrealist painter who emigrated to Spain and later to Argentina where he spent most of his life (see later in the book).

called "Lyrical poetry of refugee university students," Italy 1946, Published by HAK Fermo). A quarter of these poems were published in several issues of *Croatia* while it was published in Fermo, and others were published ten years later in a book *Pod tuđim nebom—Hrvatsko emigrantsko pjesništvo (1945–1955)*. The introduction of the book was signed by Stjepan Horvat, the NDH era rector of the University of Zagreb. Although everyone still called him "the Rector," he signed it simply as "university professor."[56] Horvat insisted that "on the tragic day in May 1945, when we stepped on the soil of a foreign land, we became former grandees. By losing our homeland, we also lost our statuses … The tragedy is even bigger that most of us will never become abroad what we were in our homeland."[57]

The HAK, Matica, PHI, and the Jadran choir occupy a special place in the memory of the Croatian diaspora, because they distinguished the Croats from other refugees and projected an image of their cultural superiority. In sum, in the collective and romanticized memory of Croatian émigrés, Camp Fermo was completely organized as a small town, "a real and respectable representative of Croatia."[58] This was also reflected in how they were treated outside the camp limits: "Soon we became popular and we were received with pleasure, not only in Fermo, but in the whole Marche region … In less than two years Campo Fermo became a 'piccolo stato,' a small state, in the words of the Italians, who envied us in many ways … With time it became the center and the meeting place of the whole Croatian emigration in Italy."[59]

They also sometimes sang popular songs. "The English commander of the camp particularly liked the song 'Hej, Ćiro sjedi s mirom, u seku ne diraj,' so he would ask them to sing it often. He was an elderly and benevolent man, and he liked the Croats, because they were the ones who asked for more soap than everyone. And he was in charge of many camps and he saw the difference."[60] Throughout the testimonies we can read how they perceived themselves as different, civilized, superior, and exceptional, and how they were treated almost as equals by the Allies, alluding that they were there by mistake, unlike other refugees. As Rojnica put it, the camp was "an oasis of Croatian statehood, of the Croatian 'state-building' idea, a part of Croatian nation."[61]

56 Mirth, *Život u emigraciji*, 54.

57 Stjepan Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice. Razmatranja o suvremenoj hrvatskoj problematici iz perspektive izbjegličkog logora* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2022), 139.

58 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 73.

59 Žanko, "Campo Fermo."

60 Luetić-Tijan, *Život Pavla Tijana*, 121.

61 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 73.

If we look at those who were children at that time, they preserve happy memories, although they were refugees. One interviewee who was born in Fermo stated: "I have photos from Fermo, because there were photographers, and I was the first baby born there, I was everybody's toy."[62] Another mixed her own memories with the memories of her mother as if they were her own, practically repeating the same wording that we can observe in adult memories: "It was like a small town, or a small state, all the intelligence gathered there and immediately founded school, choir, theater, a chapel, we were not lacking anything. We stayed there for two years. I had a good time, I went to school, my teacher organized school plays and everything. I used to say to my sisters, you can say what you want, but I was happy, I had friends, I did not worry about anything! … Everything was nice, there was no fights. There was unity."[63] Another also stated, "If I have to define Campo Fermo, I would say that there was solidarity beyond everything."[64] Neda Rosandić Šarić also recalls that "naturally, the children were behaving as children even there," and played in the camp as if it were a normal environment.[65]

One man particularly remembers the Boy Scouts and how in the summer of 1947 the British Army took them to camp by the Adriatic Sea:

> There were beautiful sandy beaches. There were almost a hundred boy scouts. By noon, we already set up all the tents. In the afternoon we explored around the camp and then everybody to the water. At dusk we formed in front of a flagpole where we hoisted the Croatian flag. The sun was setting on the horizon. The only sound was the sound of the waves. While two classmates slowly lowered our flag, Master Pedro sang the Croatian anthem "Lijepa naša domovino" (Our beautiful homeland). We all began to sing moved by an invisible energy, possibly what our elder call patriotism. One hundred children's voices rose from the beach and dispersed in the immensity of the Adriatic Sea. On the other side was Croatia.[66]

Again, and in hindsight a very romanticized and patriotic memory is displayed here, representing that everyone, like a choir, was singing and breathing as one and feeling nostalgia for the homeland. Some keep very

62 Interview with Š.N. (born 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 11, 2018.
63 Interview with T.K. (born 1935), member of the 1.5 generation, September 10, 2018.
64 Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina*, 48.
65 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 78.
66 Sprljan, *Campo Fermo*, 34–35.

important memories from that time. Neda Rosandić Šarić states that even though she was only four years old, she vividly remembers how this was the last time she saw her father, Mime Rosandić, who left the camp with the aim to join the Crusaders within Operation April 10. In spring of 1947, she tried to cross the creek, jumping from one stone to another when her father was waiting and carried her across.[67]

Camp Fermo has a special place in the memory of the Croatian diaspora. It existed for almost three years, during which time it was a place of transition for the Croatian exiles. Unlike the previously described groups that evacuated earlier, or those who fled with money and through ratlines, they arrived at the camp physically and morally destroyed, but as soon as they recovered, they started rebuilding their lives and their traditions. They transitioned from despair to accepting defeat and eventually came to terms with their exile. The camp was also where their narrative as a diaspora was established, a narrative that they have maintained and preserved for three generations, according to which they were an innocent, civilized, and cultured stateless nation in exile, victims of international politics, whose political activity was aimed at changing the situation to create the conditions for their return to their homeland after freeing it from Communism.

In 1946, the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees visited camps in Italy, Austria, and Germany and established a plan for screening war criminals. Those on the "white list" were non-collaborators with the Nazi regime who were eligible for entry visas overseas, those on the "grey list" were to be checked and transferred to Germany, and those on the "black list" were to be extradited. In 1947, the British military police and the Refugee Screening Commission started entering camps with lists of war criminals to be extradited to Yugoslavia.[68] In Austria, they were accompanied by a man labeled the Black Mask, "a masked Croat who accompanied American military police to the DP camp Lehen or to the barracks in Salzburg, who would just point to the person who should be taken to the prison. He never spoke a word; he was just giving signs. It was never discovered who hid behind the Black Mask."[69] According to Rosandić Šarić, there were also collaborators in Italy, whether Croats or foreigners: "The infamous Major Stephen Clissold, a member of the British military intelligence service, stood out especially

67 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 15.

68 Marica Karakaš Obradov, "'Depoi špijuna i terorista.' Savezнички logori za 'raseljene osobe' u Italiji, Austriji i Njemačkoj," in *1945. Kraj ili novi početak?*, ed. Zoran Janjetović (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2016), 320–21.

69 Jere Jareb, *Zlato i novac Nezavisne Države Hrvatske izneseni u inozemstvo 1944. i 1945: dokumentarni prikaz* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Institut za povijest. Dom i svijet, 1997), 317.

in the hunt for Croats. Before World War II, Clissold worked as a lecturer at the University of Zagreb, he knew many people in Zagreb. In Italy, he thus recognized and identified individual refugees, many died because of him, he also sent Dr. Vladimir Židovec to his death, who during the Independent State of Croatia held several high positions, including chargé d'affaires at the NDH Embassy to Bulgaria."[70] We can see a complete disassociation from any guilt or responsibility, and it was again a foreign, again British agent to be blamed for the tragedy of innocent people, rather than assuming responsibility for the NDH regime and its top officials for crimes committed during World War II. Although we can question the due process of the trials in socialist Yugoslavia against NDH officials, it is unacceptable to completely dismiss any responsibility of the Ustaša regime, a trend that we can constantly observe in the memoirs of adults, children, and posterior generations. Clissold wrote a booklet in late 1970s about Croatian separatism and the activities of the most radical groups of the Croatian émigré community against Yugoslav institutions at home and abroad (also see chapter 4).[71]

Some did not register before the Camp Administration, because they did not trust the British ("knowing that the British extradited to the Yugoslav Army a lot of Croats after the surrender at Bleiburg, and also members of the Croatian government"),[72] or later registered under false names, but could never rest or be sure they would not be discovered. This is why they usually slept outside the camp.[73] From the Croatian refugees' point of view, they were innocent victims of Tito's Communist persecution:

> It is enough to be Croat, to be completely deprived of your rights, to be treated worse than the highest German Nazi leaders. The Nazis were at least tried in Nuremberg, while the Croats are being handed over to Tito and thus sent to death without trial, without due process, without the right to defense …. Night raids around camps, arrests, tying people in chains and separating fathers from their families are now regular events in Croatian refugee camps. No Croatian refugee can feel sure at night that he will not find himself chained in the morning and taken to an unknown place.[74]

70 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 69.

71 Stephen Clissold, "Croat Separatism: Nationalism, Dissidence, and Terrorism," *Conflict Studies* 103 (1979): 3–21.

72 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 67.

73 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 69.

74 VD, "I razseljene osobe su ljudi," *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica* 17 (September 15, 1947), 3.

Again, we can observe that the underlying message is that they were innocent, and that they would be sent back to Yugoslavia and that their only guilt was being a Croat, which was a bigger crime than being a Nazi, who were at least given a fair trial. So, the mark of victimization was firmly impregnated into the narrative of the refugees already in Camp Fermo, and it would later be perpetuated over time and across generations.

Some arrested persons managed to escape, as in the case of Daniel Crljen, who was taken to the local carabinieri station in July 1946 and rescued by Croatian soldiers and a young woman. Another operation was a source of particular pride for the Croatian refugee community and was transmitted to later generations. On April 20, 1947, Žanko and forty other Croats were arrested and sent to prison in Rome. According to Anka Rukavina, who participated in their rescue, the main culprit was again Stephen Clissold who identified them as war criminals.[75] The goal was to repatriate them to Yugoslavia. Ten, including Žanko, managed to escape on May 31, 1947, again with the external help of Croatian soldiers and a young woman. In the chapter titled "Innocent in Elena Regina," Žanko gives a detailed account of the event. They smuggled an iron saw into the prison hidden in a loaf of bread and "one afternoon visit, before our scared eyes, a young girl R miraculously appeared, as a classical figure from a Croatian epic and informed us with energic voice that everything is ready for our rescue."[76] The girl was Anka Rukavina, who regularly came to visit and drew the plan for the rescue. The soldiers from the outside cut the barbed wire from the prison wall, jumped over the wall, and waited for Žanko and others to throw a rope from the cell window and wait for them to climb down the rope and help them escape the prison. Many of those who did not manage to escape were eventually executed in Yugoslavia.[77]

One of those from the "black list" was Dinko Šakić, who managed to leave the camp without being arrested. He "discretely abandoned the camp and took the first train to Rome" and eventually emigrated to Argentina.[78] He was arrested in 1998, fifty years later, and stood a trial before the Zagreb County Court in 1999 for crimes against civilians committed during the

75 Maja Runje, "U čast jednog sjajnog nacionalističkog naraštaja: razgovor s Ankom Rukavina," *Politički zatvorenik*, No. 196–197, 21–25, 24, https://www.hdpz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Politicki-zatvorenik-196_197.pdf.

76 Dušan Žanko, *Svjedoci: izabrani eseji, prikazi, sjećanja* (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1987), 402.

77 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*.

78 Dinko Šakić, *S Poglavnikom u Alpama: 1946. godine:*(*dio uspomena iz veće cjeline*) (Split: Laus, 2001), 108.

time he was commander of Jasenovac Ustaša extermination camp. Vilim Peroš stated that the first arrests had a big effect on the community in Fermo and that this motivated the people to emigrate.[79]

The Croatian refugees realized that they were not safe in Fermo anymore but returning to Croatia was not an option. Therefore, they began to contemplate going overseas: "The threads that still strongly tie us to the homeland are becoming thinner and thinner, many are starting to break down … the gazes that two or three years ago were looking back, now are starting to look ahead, towards the unknown, towards the foreign world, towards the other side of the ocean, the uncertainty …. The majority, motivated by the instinct for life and the innocent eyes of the children, have slowly started to look forward, to obtain passports, to study the first words of an unknown language, to prepare again, this time for a new exodus."[80] They were offered to go to Paraguay, but they stated that they "want to go home, and not to Paraguay, where there is no water, but there are plenty of snakes." This is when the option to emigrate to Argentina appeared, "but the trip costed 300 dollars."[81] Croatian refugees who had already arrived in Argentina started organizing the arrival of subsequent groups through Caritas Croatia by providing lodging and finding jobs for them.[82]

The end of an era and life in Fermo was announced in the last issue of *Croatia*, on October 1, 1947: "Destiny separates us again and we have to set off. We have fulfilled our duty until the end. As soon as we find refuge somewhere, we will continue until our final victory, because we have not left Croatia to look for a better and more comfortable life in foreign countries of the world, but to continue our fight for the Croatian state. We are aware of that duty—and we are determined to endure until the end."[83] The majority of Croats from the Fermo camp (*Fermaši*—Fermo people) ended up in Argentina—the "new Fermo": "as Camp Fermo had a reputation for its high intellectual and political level and activity, so, for many years, Argentina, and especially Buenos Aires and its surroundings would be the intellectual and political center of Croatian political emigration."[84]

79 HDA–SDS RSUP SRH 1561/ I.1–1., 13. Peroš was journalist and editor in chief of the *Nova Hrvatska* during the NDH era. He emigrated to Italy and repatriated to Yugoslavia in 1947, where he was sentenced to death.

80 Žanko, "Campo Fermo."

81 Testimony by Vilim Peroš, HDA–SDS RSUP SRH 1561/ I.1–1., 56.

82 *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica*, no. 17 (September 15, 1947): 9.

83 *Croatia, kulturno-politički list Hrvata izbjeglica*, no. 18 (October 1, 1947): 2.

84 Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede*, 121.

Under UDBA interrogation, Ustaša first lieutenant Jezovšek also confirmed that the inner organization of the camp "was a model for all other camps, but also nations… It is wrong to consider Camp Fermo as completely Ustaša oriented, and even more wrong to consider it pro-Pavelić. The political structure was the following: everyone was in favor of a Croatian state, but not in favor of an NDH renewal, since they thought that a state as such should be reestablished, and all the other issues should be left to the people—the choice of the leadership and the state organization."[85] In general, we can see a contrast between the majority of the memoirs of the witnesses of the times and the testimonies given under UDBA interrogations, but some traits observed are in common.

In hindsight, for the first generation, Fermo marked the start of the long exile of "wandering around the world, looking for happiness, that does not exist out of the homeland … and was the first place to offer hospitality, a roof and refuge to hundreds of Croatian sons and daughters after a tragic exodus from the Croatian homeland."[86] For the 1.5 generation, those who did not remember, lived with its memory as if it were their own: "I vaguely remember some scenes. But I heard the major part from the adults. For many years I have been listening to conversations about the withdrawal and the Camp Fermo. It could be said that Fermo left an indelible mark in the memories of the people who went through it."[87]

That Which Is Missing: The Flip Side of the Memory of Camp Fermo

As seen in the above analysis, the Croatian diaspora's memory of Camp Fermo formed the basis for their narrative that they were innocent victims of persecution. According to Croatian refugees' memories and narratives of Fermo, they were a peaceful, religious, and devoted group that was united in its suffering, and they breathed as one in their effort to rebuild their lives in the camp (and eventually overseas), immediately founding their "piccolo stato croato"—a source of both envy and pride for the local Italians and the British command of the camp because of their

85 Jezovšek testimony, HDA–SDS RSUP SRH 1561/ I.1–1., 120. Jezovšek was a Ustaša first lieutenant, a member of the Ustaša Surveillance Service (Ustaška nadzorna služba—UNS), and a member of the Kavran group.

86 "Hrvatski logor u Fermu," *Hrvatski narod*, Buenos Aires (July 19, 1966), 7.

87 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 65.

civilizational, cultural, and moral superiority. The process of collective memory also implies a process of forgetting or leaving out those parts that are not useful in the construction of a memory, so it is useful to briefly consider the parts that were left out, the uncomfortable details that were erased because they were not instrumental to their narrative or because they contradicted it.

One part is the female story. Several female interviewees who were children in Fermo mixed personal memories with their mothers' memories and gave a different version of the story: "Mom was alone with the four of us, we were in camps for four years. I remember the trains, we got on and off for fourteen times, the Americans were moving us here and there."[88] Another also draws from her mother's memory: "My mom was very skinny, and she survived by washing the napkins and the underwear for the soldiers, and they would give her one spoonful of soup from their plate."[89] Another who was born in Fermo stated: "People who had money could buy other things, but it was hard for those who couldn't. The men had a blast, they did not do anything, just playing cards, singing, joking around, and going to the beach, while women were taking care of the children."[90]

Not only the female version sheds a different light. There are some men, mostly intellectuals, such as the Zagreb University rector Stjepan Horvat, and two Catholic intellectuals, Luka Brajnović and Pavao Tijan, who also wrote negatively of the refugee days in Fermo in their memoirs. Tijan stressed that there were differences among refugees: "There were people who had money, so they bought good food in the town, some lamb, and then they had to go to the beach by the sea so that others don't see them."[91] Brajnović was more critical: "There were also some negative facts and phenomena, the ones that could be denominated as Zolaistic: adultery, alcoholism and certain moral decadence of a small minority, and others that could be considered as direct treasons and murders. I don't want to remember the former and I see the latter as an episode in our refugee life."[92] Horvat gave a detailed account of the situation in his diary while at Camp Fermo, written in 1946 and 1947 but published only recently, in 2022: "A relatively significant number of us are intellectuals, but many of them do not reflect by anything the fact that they belong to the intellectual class. It is not a rare case that while observing

88 Interview on July 31, 2018, with M.M.S. (born 1942), the 1.5 generation.
89 Interview on August 1, 2018, with M.G. (born 1945), the 1.5 generation.
90 Interview with Š.N. (born in 1945), August 11, 2018.
91 Luetić-Tijan, *Život Pavla Tijana*, 121.
92 Brajnović, *Despedidas y encuentros*, 87.

the acting and the behavior of a certain member of this class one has to ask who gave this man a diploma."[93] He particularly criticized craftsmen whose work was indispensable, but they charged the refugees more money than the local Italian craftsmen who had to pay taxes and bills. He also stressed that many refugees earned very well with smuggling, and that this was the reason why locals generally saw them in a negative light and as unwanted guests,[94] quite the opposite to the mainstream narrative and memory of the Fermo camp among the Croatian diaspora.

He also referred to different refugee experiences, and to illustrate he gives two characteristic examples. The first one was of a former NDH official who escaped Croatia with his family and "every sort of God's gift: 10,800 various cigarettes, 155 boxes of 50 g tobacco with cigarette paper and some cigars, 40 kg of fat, three bags of flour by 40 kg and other foodstuff, all packed in three boxes of around 280 kg each, four suitcases of clothes, shoes, silver cutlery and bed linen … all for three family members." Another is of an "official who needed a whole truck to transport his belongings from one camp to another, and his family protested when a couple of refugees moved to 'their' room, while there were around forty students packed in another room of the same size."[95] He also stated that it was a known fact that all the high officials got one hundred gold coins when they evacuated from the NDH, and while he says that understandably they could not live in a camp (because of the danger of getting arrested), he questions if all of them were given the gold by a really honest criterion. But above all, he held against them the fact that they had no empathy for those in camps, like him, "who have not monetized our patriotism." He concluded this section with a question: "Do they really think that they deserve more luck than we do?"[96] He finally summarized: "All in all, we are little Croatia, with all its praiseworthy advantages and flaws worthy of condemnation … While one group does well with its positive deeds and leaves good impressions, the other spoils it with its negative actions."[97]

93 Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice*, 57. Horvat died in 1985, and his daughter donated his diary to the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome in 1989 and authorized the college to dispose of it the way it deemed fit. One copy of the diary was sent to the then rector of Zagreb University in 1991, together with the rector's chain that Horvat took with him when he left Zagreb, but the copy was not found later. It then took the college an additional thirty years to publish the diary manuscript.

94 Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice*, 57–58.

95 Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice*, 59.

96 Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice*, 60.

97 Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice*, 58.

Those who were children at that time give a slightly different account. "Mutual respect and understanding were at a high level. Rejection was experienced only by rare individuals, those who engaged in war profiteering or bowed down to the stronger and were ready to betray. It is hard for me to accept that there were such people among the Croats, but there were, as unfortunately there still are today," a member of the 1.5 generation concludes.[98]

Jandrić stressed that the NDH elites, referring to top political and military officials, also responsible for war crimes and atrocities, had the most difficult experience in Fermo because they had been deprived of their comfortable lifestyles and had to engage in an everyday fight for survival, constantly fearing extradition to Yugoslavia.[99] At the other pole, there were those at the bottom of the social hierarchy: assassins, criminals, and prostitutes. And in the middle, there were those who found salvation in honest work. As a result of the adversity and hunger in all the camps, including Fermo, there were frequent thefts inside the camp and in local vineyards and orchards. Some refugees engaged in the smuggling of foreign currency, stolen goods, and opiates. There were also cases of homicides being committed for personal reasons that were justified by a suspicion of Communist infiltration. As a result of the scarcity of necessities, many women resorted to or were forced into prostitution by their family members, and the services of these prostitutes were paid for with cigarettes and other goods.

Danijel Uvanović, journalist, who was one of the people identified by Clissold in his testimony to the State Security Service stated that "the Ustaša police officials took with them a whole group of prostitutes … there was a lot of prostitution at the camp, partly as profession, partly as a form of exploitation of the camp inmates."[100] He stated that even Polish soldiers from Anders' corps came and took away several "Croatian women for entertainment in their trucks … But the camp inmates did the same among themselves, with female inmates, and also regardless of the sex, age and civil status." Uvanović confirms that there was syphilis and said that Žanko tried to cover it up with different attractions, sport matches, theater plays, concerts, etcetera, to maintain a good image of the camp. He evaluated that in general the morale in the camp was low, the people were stealing from

98 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 68.

99 Berislav Jandrić, "Savezнички izbjeglički logori počeci otpora hrvatske političke emigracije komunističkom režimu u domovini (logor Fermo)," in *1945.—razdjelnica hrvatske povijesti*, ed. Nada Kisić-Kolanović et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), 318–19.

100 Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 72.

each other, from the English warehouses, and from the surrounding Italian population, concluding that "those who stole around the houses were the same ones who during the Ustaša savaging were destroying 'everything that was Serb,'"[101] and is almost the only one who explicitly mentions the use of violence during the NDH era and by NDH officials.

Božidar Petračić also confirmed that there were "women who went from hand to hand, but that was nothing new because they exercised that profession in Croatia, too, such as 'Vendere' who was a bar dancer in Croatia, 'Tuberculosis' who had her prostitution permit in Zagreb, and Tamara as well." However, "almost every girl who was old enough to get married got married. Many children were born from these many marriages."[102] He also states that there was syphilis that was brought from Croatia: "Prostitution everywhere. A lot of bastard children. Girls suddenly turned into women 'with a short but turbulent history' … Husbands usually sent their wives, or fathers their daughters to Polish or British soldiers for cigarettes or a couple of cans."[103] Karakaš Obradov suggests that we should be skeptical about the testimonies regarding the "extent of immorality" since this information was given by those émigrés who were extradited to Yugoslav intelligence services,[104] but if we consider the misery and deprivations of refugee life in a camp for three years it is logical that such things occurred. Also, they were confirmed by many witnesses, directly by some, and indirectly by others. Jezovšek also points out that the board had a forged stamp of the camp command and they forged documents for war criminals,[105] while Vilim Peroš testifies that Žanko and a few more lived comfortably in the camp building, and that he refused to submit accounting books to the supervisory board for auditing when there were elections for the camp committee.[106]

There were already political divisions in Fermo. In the summer of 1945, one Croat was killed near the river Tenna under suspicion that he was a Yugoslav spy. In the spring of 1946, two men were beaten up for switching to the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka—HSS), which lead to the transfer of HSS members to the camp in Bagnoli.[107] The same was confirmed by Vilim Peroš.[108] Some men also got into a lot of fights among

101 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 46.
102 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 135.
103 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 183.
104 Obradov, "Depoi špijuna i terorista," 327.
105 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 122.
106 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 53.
107 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 171.
108 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 13.

themselves or with Italians or Poles, which lead to the vendetta murder of one Croat and the wounding of another.[109]

According to Italian scholar Costantino di Sante's work on the history of the Fermo tannery, the relations between the locals and the Croats were not as harmonious as they presented in most of their memoirs.[110] The Croats could exit the camp and were responsible for violence, robberies, and illegal trafficking. For example, on October 6, 1946, some Croatian refugees were involved in a brawl in a tavern in Campoleggio, after which they attacked the local cinema, injuring three people. In retaliation, some Fermo locals attacked the Croats near the hamlet, killing one refugee and seriously injuring four others. Despite an increased level of control in the camp due to these events, there were further assaults and moments of tension both inside and outside the camp walls. Another episode was registered in April 1947, when Croatian political exiles set the local branches of the Communist and the Socialist Party in Casette di Tenna on fire.

In the autumn of 1947, Croats began to be transferred to Latin America. The International Refugee Organization (IRO) decided to replace them with 1,500 Jewish refugees. But there was a transitory period in the winter of 1947 when around five hundred Jewish survivors of Nazi-fascist persecutions were forced to share the same space with over a thousand Croats—members or sympathizers of the Nazi puppet NDH that exterminated Jews under its rule. There is no record of this in the memoirs of the Croatian refugees, except for the testimony under interrogation by Vilim Peroš.[111]

Conclusion

Camp Fermo has a special place in the memory of the Croatian diaspora. It existed for almost three years (1945–48), during which time it was a place where the Croatian exiles transitioned from despair to assuming defeat and eventually came to terms with their exile. The camp was also where their narrative as a diaspora was established, which they have maintained and preserved for three generations, according to which they are an innocent, civilized, and cultured stateless nation in exile, a victim of international

109 HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 173.

110 The author would like to thank Costantino di Sante for sharing his screenplay draft of the documentary film about the history of the Fermo tannery. The cases mentioned in this section are taken from the draft.

111 First testimony by Vilim Peroš, HR–HDA–1561, SDS RSUP SRH/ I.1–1., 12.

politics, whose political activity was aimed at changing the situation to create the conditions for their return to a free homeland.

Considering the duration of the Croatian refugees' stay at the Fermo camp and given the intensity of the events, the importance of Fermo for the destiny and the narrative of the post-World War II Croatian diaspora in Argentina becomes clear. Fermo marks the start of a decades-long exile and recalls the trauma that served as a unifying element of the identity of this group across generations—the military defeat, the loss of an independent state, the postwar killings, and forced migration. When the Croatian refugees left for a new life in Argentina, they left behind all the elements that did not fit into their narrative—from the NDH to what they did in Fermo to survive. But, above all, Fermo symbolizes their desired identity as a cultured, educated, and civilized community, a nation that, on grounds of its tradition and culture, had the right to independence, and it ultimately served them as a driving engine of their activities in exile.

3. Destination Argentina

Abstract: The third chapter is dedicated to destination Argentina, Croatian settlement and the linguistic and working obstacles they had to overcome, as well as the organization of everyday life, and the pillars of memory and identity. The chapter also analyzes the textile industry as a predominantly Croatian sector and the contribution of Croatian highly skilled professionals to Argentinean society. Special attention is paid to endogamous marriages of generation 1.5 and the second generation as a basis of community preservation.

Keywords: arrival in Argentina, pillars of memory, tools of community preservation

The Arrival

In his book on Argentina as the main destination for Nazi emigration, Meding identifies several routes taken: the submarine route, legal emigration, the Italian route (crossing the Alps, the monastery line, the ratlines, or the Argentine transfer line), the Nordic line, the Iberian line, and the Swiss route.[1] The ratlines have been most studied due to the attractiveness of the topic about the clandestine routes of war criminals fleeing Europe, but they only cover a small group of individuals. Here we are going to explain why and how Argentina admitted so many immigrants to its soil in late 1940s.

Since Argentina aimed at catching up with the population of its rival Brazil (fourteen vs. forty-four million people), the first Perón government's five-year plan included a massive import of highly skilled workers.[2] Perón made use of the unfavorable social situation in Europe after World War II and

1 Holger Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempos de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1999).

2 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 75-6.

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-4

its destruction of industry. Also, Italians and Spaniards came from the earlier waves of immigration to Argentina and they were favorably looked at. The Italian government discovered that negotiation with Argentina constituted a useful means to get rid of the complex problem of refugees, in such a way that the immigration solution was extraordinarily functional for all the parties involved.[3] Italy was saturated with refugees and Argentina in August opened the Argentinian Immigration Delegation in Europe (Delegación Argentina para la Inmigración en Europa—DAIE) and on December 6, 1946, Perón sent a delegation to Rome "with wide competences for authorizing entry into Argentina," and organize a central office for the selection of European candidates.[4] The delegation was headed by two men, a Salesian priest Silva (brother of ultranationalist General Oscar Silva) and Adolfo Scilingo, minister plenipotentiary of the Argentinian ministry of foreign affairs, who were key in the selection of "preferably white and anti-Communist Italians."[5] Or, as Senkman puts it, "Since the sanction of the 1946–51 Five-Year Plan, the right to immigrate was legitimized, by omission: all those Europeans who did not fit the religious and ethnic selection criteria would be rejected."[6] He also states that:

> This triple economic, ethnic and ideological selectivity of immigrants was carried out by the General Directorate of Immigration (DI), whose jurisdiction passed from the Ministry of the Interior to the Secretariat of Labor and Welfare and, starting in February 1949, to the Technical Secretariat of the Nation, adopting the new name of the National Directorate of Migration. Along with the DI, two new state agendas were added: at the end of 1946, the Commission for the Reception and Resettlement of Immigrants (Comisión de Recepción y Encauzamiento de Inmigrantes—CREI), chaired by the president of the Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Exchange (Instituto Argentino de Promoción del Intercambio—IAPI) and DAIE.[7]

Argentina announced that it would accept a total of four million immigrants, thirty thousand per month, so if we consider the situation of the refugees

3 Fernando Devoto, "Inmigrantes, refugiados y criminales en la 'vía italiana' hacia la Argentina en la segunda posguerra," *Ciclos en la historia, economía y sociedad* 19, no. 1 (2000): 151–75, 159.

4 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 76.

5 Devoto, *Inmigrantes, refugiados y criminales*, 171.

6 Leonardo Senkman, "Etnicidad e inmigración durante el primer peronismo," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y El Caribe* 3, no. 2 (1992): 5–38, 17.

7 Senkman, "Etnicidad e inmigración," 18.

that were already in the internment camps for more than a year, we can understand why this was called "Argentinian fever."[8]

As stated by Meding:

> apart from his official role as head of DAIE, Father Silva also fulfilled a personal assignment granted to him by Perón: he took care of refugees who wanted to arrive in Argentina without having complete documentation. In coordination with the director of the Argentine immigration authorities, Santiago Peralta, the delegation granted in each case the entry permit (*libre desembarco*), sometimes solely based on documents from the International Red Cross, which worked in collaboration with the Embassy and especially with the Argentine Consulate in Genoa. Apart from that, they also resolved the issues related to the boarding of the affected people. Above all, the Germans who had managed to go unnoticed by the Allied authorities in the Italian ports, and they rushed to the Argentinian consulate.[9]

In line with what was already mentioned regarding the hiding of war criminals in Italy, Meding also remarks that "the United States, which intended to solve the problem of refugees in Western Europe to stabilize political conditions, was interested in working on the matter together with Argentina and also for that reason they turned a blind eye to the fact that Argentina received entire groups that, according to Allied provisions, were in no way supposed to abandon the old continent."[10] The Yugoslav legation in Buenos Aires informed the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Silva's trip to Italy, stating that "his arrival to Italy woke a lot of hope among Ustaša ranks, especially the most atrocious war criminals. They see in his arrival the solution of their future existence and hope to escape justice with his help … and continue with their criminal fascist activities aimed against the Federal Popular Republic of Yugoslavia and the United Nations." The report also states that the National Directorate of Migration gave an order to the Argentinian consulate in Rome to issue an entry visa for a group of forty Ustaša that were to come to Argentina in January 1947.[11]

On October 6, 1947, the Yugoslav ambassador to Argentina, France Pirc, requested the MFA for the FPRY to deliver the documentation on Ante

8 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 77.
9 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 77.
10 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 77.
11 DA MSP RS, PA, 1947, Folder 26, 7444/47 9/651.

Pavelić, because they expected his arrival in Argentina "any time soon," stating that he was at that time residing at a monastery in southern Italy awaiting his transfer to Argentina.[12] In fact, already in August 1947, the Yugoslav legation in Buenos Aires reported to the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship that Ante Pavelić was expected to arrive soon, and the Ministry responded that they established "corresponding measures, without favorable result so far."[13]

Although Meding's book is focused on Germans, he also mentions Croatian refugees "fleeing in the fear of vengeance of Tito's partisans," and addresses the key figures in organizing their evacuation to Argentina. In Italy it was their representative within the Papal relief commission, Monsignor Krunoslav Stjepan Draganović, theologian of the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, who "tirelessly concerned himself with the fate of his compatriots. Draganović and bishop Alois Hudal coordinated their work both with the team of Red Cross collaborators who granted passports, as well as with the network of consular, port and shipping officials."[14] On the other side of the ocean, in Buenos Aires, was the Franciscan friar Blaž Štefanić, who managed to get the Argentine immigration authorities to approve a quota of two hundred and fifty people on November 27, 1946, "without mention of names or any documents revision."[15] This is confirmed by Sinovčić who states that

> its beneficiaries were determined by a committee created for this purpose in Rome (within the Croatian Confraternity of St. Jerome). The committee proposed to the Argentinian consulate in Rome persons who would like to immigrate to Argentina, and the consulate issued visas to stateless travel documents, issued by the Roman police, or to Red Cross passports. Later, especially when the International Refugee Organization (IRO) took over the care of refugees, a system of lists was used, which were drawn up in Rome (and sometimes in Hamburg by the delegate of the Vatican mission for Croats in Germany, Andrija Kordić, or in Munich, by Leo Gračan, secretary of the Croatian Catholic Mission in Germany), and were sent

12 DA MSP RS, PA, 1947, Folder 26, 9/675, October 6, 1947. Subject: Extradition of war criminals.

13 "Ante Pavelic y colaboradores" [Ante Pavelić and collaborators file], in *Proyecto testimonio: Respuestas del Estado Argentino ante los pedidos de extradición de criminales de guerra y reos del delito contra la humanidad bajo el Tercer Reich*, ed. Paul Warzawski, vol. 2 (DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales, Buenos Aires: Planeta 1998), 69.

14 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 117. Alois Hudal was an Austrian bishop of the Catholic Church, and a key figure in the establishments of ratlines after World War II.

15 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 117.

> from there to the Croatian Caritas in Buenos Aires, and the latter then carried to the Argentinian Directorate for Migration. Once approved, they were returned to Rome for further processing.[16]

According to DAIA's *Proyecto testimonio* report on the arrival of Nazis to Argentina, Draganović's contact in Argentina and a key figure was Branko Benzon, first NDH ambassador to the Third Reich, and later to Romania and Hungary.[17] The report states that from 1946 to 1949, "he was 'advisor for Yugoslav and Croatian immigration' and formed part of the group of 'confidential advisors' of the Director of the Directorate General for Migrations, Pablo Diana and he was dedicated to 'channeling Central European immigration flow with the consent of the president of Argentina.'"[18]

Senkman states that from 1947 to 1949, the DAIE included a category of "desirable non-Latin selection: anti-Communist Catholic refugees," several thousand Croatian, Ukrainian, Polish, Hungarian, and Baltic collaborator refugees, as well as Nazi Germans and Austrians, who resettled in Argentina through the UN IRO, and that, despite the fact that Argentina did not become a member of the IRO, they received the highest number of these refugees: 32,172 entered until the end of 1949, and around 10,000 came from Yugoslavia.[19] Moreover, "Thousands of Croats and Poles from General Anders' army arrived in contingents assisted by the International Red Cross and the IRO, with fictitious names and armed with voyage titles and Nansen passports thanks to a clandestine escape network professionally set up by Croatian Catholic priests, led by Father Krunoslav Draganović, secretary of the Croatian College of St. Jerome in Rome, with the unofficial connivance of the Vatican."[20] This influx was regulated, and since 1949 it was required that the requests be formulated individually for each case and that the petitioner—charitable agency, family members, or future employer—was guaranteed the DI housing, employment, and maintenance of the refugee in the country. In 1949, the Argentine authorities stopped issuing permits by list

16 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990* (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1991), 40–41.

17 On March 31, 1941, Benzon presented a memorandum to the minister of foreign affairs of the Third Reich Joachim von Ribbentrop, asking for the support of the NDH establishment. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 34.

18 Beatriz Gurevich, "Etnicidad, ideología y política migratoria," in *Proyecto testimonio. Revelaciones de los archivos argentinos sobre la política oficial en la era nazi-fascista*, ed. Beatriz Gurevich, vol. 1 (DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales, Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1998), 53.

19 Senkman, "Etnicidad e inmigración," 19.

20 Senkman, "Etnicidad e inmigración," 25.

and introduced a system of personal (individual) applications, the so-called *llamadas* (calls). In addition, Croats continued to arrive in groups until, at the end of 1951, they exhausted all previously issued permits.[21] Sinovčić says that: "As it regularly happens that people enter a country without proper travel documents and that many of those who get them stay in it for a certain period, so there were a lot of them in Argentina after World War II, even among the Croats. That issue was resolved by a presidential pardon on Argentina's Independence Day on 9 July 1949, enabling all immigration law offenders to solve their legal status. Later, all those who immigrated to Argentina under false names were also pardoned."[22]

Meding states that a certain number of Germans also found their place in the Croatian quotas and that Draganović made them pay a double sea ticket in order to finance the crossing of the Atlantic for the Croatian refugees, especially since there was supposedly another quota of two hundred and fifty people for the Croats, which allowed Germans to mix among the Croats and travel with false documents.[23] As Meding concludes, "Without interruption from 1945 until the first years of the 1950s, a torrent of aspiring emigrants of all nationalities from central and eastern Europe arrived by illegal means, through Church institutions, to Italian overseas ports. This gave rise to the impression among many that the Pope himself must have given a protection order in such a case." Meding argues that "the allies were not unfamiliar with" the monastery and the ratlines. Citing a May 1947 report by the US secret agent Vincent La Vista, the following conclusion arose: "The Vatican is the largest organization committed to the illegal re-dispatch of emigrants. … The Vatican bases its participation in illegal human trafficking with its desire to infiltrate people not only to European countries but also to Latin America, regardless of their political orientation and as long as they are anti-Communist and pro-Catholic Church."[24]

Meding also states that the organizers of the ratlines had been able to win Krunoslav Draganović for their own ranks, as a liaison man for Genoa. The monsignor made his services available to the Americans with great pleasure, since by doing so he gained invaluable support. This also enabled Draganović to take care of his fellow Croatians, and the CIC also "rewarded the clandestine departure of its own people [agents] with true generosity for those times: among a thousand and one thousand four hundred dollars

21 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 41.
22 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 42.
23 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 118.
24 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 119.

per person. In return, Draganović had to ensure to maintain the secrecy of the operation and, if necessary, provide documentation to the people involved—as a rule a Red Cross passport—and an entry visa for a South American country. Draganović met the expectations placed on him to the satisfaction of his clients."[25]

As delays in the departure of ships were common in Genoa, "a hotel was chosen for the secret operation where no questions of any kind would be asked. The CIC men accompanied the person. They had been entrusted to the ship, where a liaison man on board took charge of further assistance. He would give him a sum of money to start over. The former spy would then leave Europe."[26] Commenting on why Argentina was interested in Germans, Meding explains: "Argentina paid only the plane ticket, while Germany had invested millions of marks in the training of these scientists and technicians,"[27] and concludes with a pragmatic and utilitarian perspective given by Juan Domingo Perón himself:

> Long before the war ended, we had already prepared for the post-war period. Germany was defeated, we knew that. And the victors wanted to take advantage of the enormous technological effort that that country had made for more than ten years. We couldn't take advantage of the machinery because it was destroyed. The only thing that could be used was the men. We were also interested in that. We let the Germans know that we were going to declare war on them to save thousands. We exchanged messages with them through Switzerland and Spain. Franco immediately understood our intention and helped us. When the war ended, those helpful Germans helped us get up new factories and improve the ones we already had. And in the process, they helped themselves.[28]

Croatian scholars and sources give a more detailed (and at times romanticized) account of the events that are worth mentioning. Jandrić mentions that, with the help of the rector of Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, Juraj Mađerac, and college secretary Draganović, the Zagreb Canteen (Zagrebačka menza—ZM) was founded for Croatian refugees in Rome, which cared for and housed Croatian refugees for more than ten years under Draganović's tutelage, not only in Rome but throughout Italy and

25 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 121–22.
26 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 122.
27 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 125.
28 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis*, 125

beyond. Special attention was directed towards the Croats threatened with extradition to Yugoslavia, and these were people who had held high political and military positions in the NDH. Some were placed in Roman monasteries, Grotta Ferata, San Paulo di Regola, Grottammare, Cento Celle, St. Cattolica, Tre Fontane, Castel Gandolfo, etc., and the rest at the refugee camps of Fermo, Bagnoli, and Modena. Members of the ZM board had connections with British and American officers, diplomats, and representatives of various countries in Rome, Roman priests of Croatian origin, cardinals, and other Vatican dignitaries. The established connections were used for political purposes, but also for the smooth operation of Croatian emigrants, who performed various tasks for the Allies, from intelligence to guarding. The board also became the center of political activities of Croatian émigrés with the great help of Draganović and Mandić, but also the financial assistance of the Vatican.[29]

Andrija Lukinović, priest of the Archdiocese of Zagreb who authored a chapter on the confraternity of St. Jerome in the volume published on the one hundredth anniversary of and by the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, offered a thorough but biased account.[30] He states that the main burden was heroically borne by Draganović, who was on the move "day and night, in all four seasons, constantly, using all possible means of transport, speaking, writing, telephoning, translating acts and documents, consoling, helping, healing, taking out of prisons, dungeons, barbed wire, which often had to be cut and torn, defeating Americans, English, French and Dutch, ecclesiastical, military and secular authorities of every kind and degree, without even stopping for a moment under the enormous burden of the Croatian misery, nothingness, hell, despair, hopelessness."[31] Lukinović also states that Draganović "established direct contacts with the Argentine Minister of Immigration, a certain Mr. Silva, and the Allied and Italian commissions for these affairs. Draganović managed to obtain joint passports and train tickets and was in direct negotiations with ship owners in Genoa, Naples and Trieste."[32] The collection arranged for the one

29 Berislav Jandrić, "Savezнички izbjeglički logori počeci otpora hrvatske političke emigracije komunističkom režimu u domovini (logor Fermo)," in *1945.—razdjelnica hrvatske povijesti*, ed. Nada Kisić-Kolanović et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), 305–22, 313–14.

30 Jure Bogdan (ed.), *Papinski Hrvatski Zavod Svetog Jeronima: (1901–2001); zbornik u prigodi stoljetnice Papinskoga hrvatskog zavoda svetog Jeronima* (Rome: Papinski Hrvatski Zavod Svetog Jeronima, 2001).

31 Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 202–203.

32 Andrija Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima za pomoć hrvatskim izbjeglicama u Rimu," in *Papinski Hrvatski Zavod Svetog Jeronima:(1901–2001); zbornik u prigodi stoljetnice Papinskoga*

hundredth anniversary of the Pontifical Croatian College of Saint Jerome notes that "the confraternity of Saint Jerome, was founded on July 19, 1945, with no formal, but tacit approval by the Holy See (it could have not been possible without it)."[33]

> The legal entanglements surrounding the Confraternity at the College were most happily resolved by the Pontifical Committee for Assistance (Pontificia Commissione Assistenza—PCA), as the Confraternity acted there as the Croatian Committee (Comitato croato). Namely, this institution aided refugees of all nations, and each of them was represented by a national committee. During these seven years, the Croatian Confraternity of St. Jerome functioned as the Croatian committee. After Mađerac's death in 1957, the Confraternity formally and effectively ceased to exist, but the Comitato croato continued to operate for several years. The Holy See showed great support for the Confraternity, and through the aforementioned Pontifical aid institution, it was the first to come to the rescue and constantly allocated considerable financial and material resources for Croatian refugees. The Confraternity was strongly connected with church aid organizations, the main being Pontifical Assistance Office founded on 22 January 1945 by Pope Pius XII by allocating considerable funds for its assistance to refugees, primarily Catholics. With it, each national group established its own committee, and Croats were represented by the Confraternity as the Comitato croato.[34]

The task was not easy, and Draganović had to visit all the DP camps and other places across Italy. In a letter, Draganović stated that the camps held at least fifteen thousand Croatian civilians and soldiers, while many were also hiding outside the camps.[35] However, "the most difficult struggle of the Confraternity was to save refugees from being extradited to Tito's Yugoslavia. In this area, the burden fell almost exclusively on the shoulders of Prof. Draganović."[36] And Meding clearly demonstrates the connections Draganović had in the ratlines. Lukinović states that "Among them there were also culprits. There was also human scum, just like in every other group. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Croatian refugees were innocent

hrvatskog zavoda svetog Jeronima, ed. Jure Bogdan (Rome: Papinski Hrvatski Zavod Svetog Jeronima, 2001).

33 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 790.

34 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 800.

35 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 806.

36 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 811.

people."[37] He adds that the largest bulk of refugees were Catholics and as such they were persecuted by Communism, and concludes: "After all, Pavelić and his closest circle of associates did not even need the Confraternity's help. They were either captured and executed before, or they managed to avoid the court of communist justice."[38]

Regarding the regular procedure for emigration, it was slow and not everything went so smoothly, and there were difficulties, such as the fact that each applicant had to appear personally to obtain a visa, which was difficult to achieve, and get permits from DP camp authorities. They also had to pay travel expenses, although they could get a loan from Argentinian authorities. Some would get help from other Croats who already made it to Argentina and pay them back as soon as they settled.[39] Stjepan Horvat also states that getting a passport was very costly, and mentions multiple, corrupt networks arising from this activity. He was critical of the organization of emigration overseas, stating that it was costly and permeated by corruption.[40] Another issue was that they were guaranteed housing and work but only physical and manual jobs.

Furthermore, Yugoslav authorities constantly sought war criminals trying to flee from Europe or were protesting before international and local authorities, which led to the application of stricter measures. Parallel to that, as early as 1947, Yugoslav authorities closely monitored the influx of Croatian political emigration into Argentina and started requesting the extradition of war criminals. The legation of the FPRY in Buenos Aires, on August 13, 1947, sent a request to the subsecretary of political affairs of the Argentinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Carlos M. Desmarás, to extradite seven war criminals hiding in the country.[41] The request was based on the UN General Assembly resolution on the extradition and prosecution of war criminals from Feb 13, 1946, and the resolution of the Inter-American

37 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 796.

38 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 797.

39 Letter to Luka Anić, Hualfin 1039, Buenos Aires, from Camp Bagnoli from "Joko," December 17, 1947. Anich family archive.

40 Stjepan Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice. Razmatranja o suvremenoj hrvatskoj problematici iz perspektive izbjegličkog logora* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2022), 253.

41 These were Dr. José Berkovic, Mirko Eterovic, Ivo Bogdan, Vinko Nikolic, Daniel Uvanovic, Marko Colak, and Esteban Latkovic. "Ante Pavelic y colaboradores" (Ante Pavelić and collaborators file). Document 3.2. from Pascual de la Rosa, MFAW Director of International Affairs to Carlos Raúl Desmarás, Undersecretary for Political Affairs, MFAW, November 13, 1946, as transcribed in *Proyecto testimonio: Respuestas del Estado Argentino ante los pedidos de extradición de criminales de guerra y reos del delito contra la humanidad bajo el Tercer Reich*, ed. Paul Warzawski, vol. 2. DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales (Buenos Aires: Planeta 1998), 70.

Conference on Problems of War and Peace held in Chapultepec on March 6, 1945.[42] The Yugoslav legation later sent several reminders of the note and repeated extradition requests, while the Argentinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship refused the extradition. After the first requests for the extradition of war criminals were sent from Yugoslavia to Argentina, on November 13, 1947, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship analyzed the legal bases of the Yugoslav request and concluded that Yugoslav requests should not be answered positively, listing these reasons: the Chapultepec conference conclusions were recommendations and not international treaty obligations, and recommendations implied only moral obligations; war crime was a recent legal category but it could be considered linked to the institute of political crime, while Argentina could only extradite persons for common, and not political crimes; the inexistence of a bilateral agreement on extradition with Yugoslavia; and, according to its constitution, Argentina did not admit special circumstances and repudiated ex post facto laws. Also, granting the Yugoslav request would mean fostering political persecution and give way to the elimination of the opposition in countries under Communist rule.[43]

Another issue was the availability of places on Italian ships with a private shipowner who started transporting refugees even before regular passenger lines to South America were opened. Gioachino Costa, "as a deeply religious person, stood out in helping the Croats by making available for the Confraternity free places or with a big discount."[44] He let many sailors from Dalmatia and Primorje board ships as sailors or engineers and transfer to new countries.[45] Lukinović insists that "the vast majority were ordinary people, who were fleeing from fear of the Communist officials of the regime, but not those from the top of the NDH government. They took care of their own safety."[46] Although he does make the distinction between criminals and innocent people, for the former he uses the euphemism, "top of the NDH government," while the others only feared Communism, and were

42 Fondo MRECIC, Box: AH/002, Date: 1947–1994, Collection: 118 Extradition of Nazis, Topic: Integrantes de la Ustacha. Pavelic, Eichmann.S Topográfica: C17–A59, Request of the Legation of the Federal Popular Republic of Yugoslavia in Buenos Aires to the Subsecretary of Political Affairs of MRECIC, Carlos M. Desmarás, August 13, 1947, MRECIC Reg. No. 319/3 S.P.10/47.

43 Document 3.2. from Pascual de la Rosa, MFAW Director of International Affairs to Carlos Raúl Desmarás, Undersecretary for Political Affairs, MFAW, November 13, 1946, as transcribed in *Proyecto Testimonio*, vol. 2, 70–74.

44 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 818.

45 Numerous lists of travelers to Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, the US, and some other countries have been preserved in the archives of the Confraternity.

46 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 819.

therefore its victims. He is obviously aware that there are many writings involving the confraternity in the operations of hiding war criminals and concludes: "Whatever was said about the Confraternity and the College of St. Jerome, the people who were in charge, and especially prof. Draganović, invested an enormous effort and did the painstaking work of taking care of Croatian refugees overseas. It is an unimaginable and enormous work. We are talking around thirty thousand people (about 20,000 of them were transferred to Argentina alone), a whole city of mostly young people."[47]

The 1.5 generation had either firsthand or secondhand memories of the arrival to the new world, combined with their interpretation of historical facts. Some make general references by saying that, thanks to the Red Cross, and when Evita Perón went to Italy, Argentina opened its doors to the emigrants,[48] or said that Evita sent ships with cereal to Italy for the refugees and then created quotas for "a bunch of immigrants to come."[49] Others were more dramatic: "A woman named Evita, traveled around Europe and visited refugee camps, and she felt pity for them … This woman interceded before her husband, Argentinian president … she kneeled before the General."[50] Evita Perón did visit Spain and Italy in the Summer of 1947, but she did not visit refugee camps nor was she in charge of the refugees. Another interviewee said: "We did not have to wait because Perón was happy that the workforce was coming,"[51] although they all spent around two and a half years in DP camps. The last one ascribed the merit to his uncle: "My uncle was a charming man, he was a playboy, so Evita was surely fascinated by him, and she and Perón grew fond of my uncle, so Perón asked him to travel to Europe and bring distinguished families to Argentina."[52] This contradicts the known facts about the role of Croatian priests in Argentina in obtaining immigration permissions for Croats in DP camps at the time.[53]

All the members of the 1.5 generation that I interviewed knew the exact date of their arrival to Argentina. Some stressed the details of the three-week sea trip. One remembered it was a warship adapted for passengers, and, although the conditions were poor and there were a couple of storms, he had a good time.[54] Others stressed that either they or their parents had

47 Lukinović, "Bratovština Svetog Jeronima," 819.
48 Interview with Š.N. (born in 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 11, 2018.
49 Interview with V.N. (born in 1947), the 1.5 generation, August 24, 2018.
50 Dunja Ozanic, *Guenechen* (Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga, 2006), 78.
51 Interview with T.K. (born in 1935), the 1.5 generation, September 10, 2018.
52 Interview with M.P. (born in 1940), the 1.5 generation, August 27, 2018.
53 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 23.
54 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), the 1.5 generation, July 30, 2018.

seasickness. Another said that she remembered that everyone told her mother how brave she was to travel with four small children; she was six at that time.[55] Another interviewee, who was three years old and did not remember the boat trip, stated: "It seems that whenever they would ring the bell for a meal, I would run to the dining area."[56]

In the beginning, the first post-World War II immigrants came individually, the first being the brothers Petar (priest) and Ljubo Čiklić, who arrived in Buenos Aires on April 6, 1946, and at the end of the year, on December 16, 1946, veterinarian Marko Čolak flew from Rome. He was the first Croat to arrive in this country by plane. Later, people came in larger and smaller groups. The first of the larger groups arrived in Argentina on January 25, 1947, on the ship *Andrea Gritti* from the Italian port of Genoa. Before them (August 26, 1946) came a group of priests, among them Father Vlado Bilobrk and Mate Luketa. Together with Father Blaž Štefanić, they were very useful for the reception, organization, and initial orientation of new Croatian immigrants.[57]

Sinovčić gives an overview of the presence of Croatian Catholic priests, mostly Franciscans, in the country, and especially their service to the émigré community. The first Croatian priest, Leonard Rusković from the Franciscan Province of St. Jerome, arrived in Argentina in 1929, and the second, Blaž Štefanić, arrived nine years later in 1938, followed by two more, Rafael Kapurso and Gabrijel Arko. As said, they were important for organizing the reception of refugees in Argentina, especially Blaž Štefanić. After World War II, four hundred refugee priests arrived in Argentina, mostly members of the two Dalmatian provinces, the Holy Redeemer (Split—Sinj) and St. Jerome (from Dubrovnik—Zadar). For the first ten years, the Franciscans from Split performed the religious service, while those from Zadar already served one Argentinian parish (José Ingenieros). In addition, they devoted themselves to caring for the accommodation and education of the youngest Croatian immigrants, and later they built a secondary school institute for Argentine children in the Buenos Aires suburb of Hurlingham.

There were also Croatian nuns. The Sisters of Mercy from Zagreb arrived in Argentina in 1934, and the Third Order Regular of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Immaculate Conception arrived in 1937, but they did not stay long. "The Sisters of Mercy spread throughout Argentina and eventually moved to Paraguay and Uruguay. Their central house is still located in Dock Sud,

55 Interview with M.M.S. (born in 1942), the 1.5 generation, July 31, 2018.
56 Interview with M.G. (born in 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 1, 2018.
57 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 39.

a southern suburb of Buenos Aires. The Sisters of Mercy, in addition, run the Croatian Saturday 'Little School' (*Mala škola*) in the Croatian religious center St. Nikola Tavelić, and the Daughters of Mercy nuns take care of the Croatian nursing home in Cortines, about seventy kilometers west of Buenos Aires.[58] Until the arrival of the priests after World War II, the holy Mass was served by the Sisters of Mercy once a month in one church in Buenos Aires, and later in several churches in Buenos Aires, while daily and evening Mass was served at Monte Street 2049.

In his memoirs, Rojnica states that "our beloved priest" Viktor Vicens from Camp Fermo arrived in Argentina on December 22, 1947, "and immediately organized a *Te Deum* on New Year's Eve at the open field of Barrio Perón where Croats were working as manual workers."[59] The Jadran choir was also present at the Mass. Vicens immediately started to care for his congregation and began to publish the journal *Ave* that he had published in Fermo, but the church authorities did not think that this was a good idea because they wanted the immigrants to assimilate.

New Life in the New World

The arrival was the beginning of a new life, which for most of the exiles meant "automatically turning from political fugitives into economic migrants, we did not have any money."[60] Upon arriving in Buenos Aires, the immigrants first passed through the Immigrants' Hotel, where they had the right to stay for five days at the state's expense, while waiting to get an identity document. Sinovčić gives an account of the first months of their immigrant lives:

> Our first immigrants after the war were located at Ameghino Street 631/635 in the town of Avellaneda, in the southern suburbs of Buenos Aires. Later, they got a building located at Monte Street 2049 in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Flores at their disposal. It was previously a Jewish nursing home. The Monte building was given by an Argentinian businessman José Balbiani who later donated it to Father Vlado Bilobrk who later secularized, and after his death in 1982, the building was sold.

58 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 53.

59 Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2 vols. (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1983), 2:196–98.

60 Interview with S.E.K. (born in 1942), the 1.5 generation, November 14, 2017.

> There they got the bare necessities: beds (in smaller and larger rooms), bedding, hygiene devices, a chapel (dedicated to Our Lady of Sinj), and a little later a communal kitchen. Of course, this is where those who did not have the means to make ends meet settled until they did, but there were also those who stayed under that roof until the building was sold. Our university-educated girls or those who were studying were housed in a multi-room house at Yerbal Street 1885, in the very center of Flores district in Buenos Aires.[61]

Some members of the 1.5 generation mention that fellow Croats helped them by chance,[62] or the help came from Croats who arrived in Buenos Aires earlier from Fermo, while others had families that settled in Argentina before the war.[63] Neda Rosandić Šarić, who spent her early childhood years in the Monte building, describes how it looked:

> We lived in our little room, which became our home. The room had two doors, but no windows. One door was on the side facing the great hall, where Friar Vlado Bilobrk arranged a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Sinj. It was always closed, on our side there was a small closet in that place. The second door opened onto the courtyard. We slept, cooked and Mom sewed in the room. The room, and the space in front of it, were also a meeting place. On hot and humid summer days, mother would take the Singer sewing machine to the door front and sew there.[64]

Her two uncles, who also arrived in Argentina, at first visited and then moved to Monte where they stayed until their death. She also mentions that "many refugees passed through the unforgettable Monte," such as the mother of the NDH minister Mate Frković, his wife Dragica, and four children who, "had a room in another building where at least their roof wasn't leaking, as was in our case; whenever it would rain, we had a bucket in one corner of our room."[65] There were also other widows of the Kavran group members, with or without children. Rosandić Šarić concludes that, "A thick book could be written about every person and every family that spent time at Monte. Sometimes I think with regret that in Croatia, after we became free [in the

61 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 42–43.
62 Interview with M.G. (born 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 1, 2018.
63 Interview with D.A.J. (born 1934), the 1.5 generation, July 31, 2018.
64 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 224.
65 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 229.

1990s] not enough was said on the suffering of the refugees, of those who ended in Argentina and many other places worldwide."[66] While the refugee experience is by all means full of suffering, what Rosandić Šarić implies here is that the suffering of the Croatian post-World War II refugees has not received enough acknowledgement when the Republic of Croatia became independent, a recurrent sentiment that we shall see later in chapter 6.

Settling in Argentina and starting from scratch was a reality, and for some it was an especially traumatic experience, because of the loss of social status and privileges: "We had to change our surname. Before we were everything and suddenly, we were nothing. … If someone told my family that my father was going to end up sweeping hotel rooms in Buenos Aires, they would have thought they were crazy. … My father was very austere, and we suffered his austerity a lot. We changed our surname back when I was fifteen. I was most affected by the classlessness, I did not have bad living conditions, but they were limited."[67] These are the words of the son of a highly ranked Ustaša and NDH official who was wanted for war crimes in Yugoslavia.

Most post-World War II Croatian emigrants settled in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. Some also went to the oil fields in Patagonia, in Comodoro Rivadavia, others to the tourist destinations (Bariloche, Mendoza, and the Atlantic coast), and several to Rosario, Córdoba or Paraná, or even to the north at the triple border between Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil.[68] As soon as they arrived, they had to find a job, but that was also not without difficulties. Sinovčić briefly describes the main characteristics of the political émigré community in Argentina:

> The fourth emigration bears all the marks of political emigration. It brought with it something that was lacking in the first and second, which is a strongly developed consciousness of belonging to the nation, and in the third: educated people. It was a state-building (*državotvorna*) emigration, as it is usually called, people aware that they have the right to what every nation strives for: freedom in their own country. Strengthened in the fight for the ideal between the two world wars and the preservation of the state when the dream of it became a reality on April 10, the state-building emigration in Argentina continued the battle in the same direction: this time for the restoration of the Croatian state.[69]

66 Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega*, 232.
67 Interview with S.E.K. (born 1942), the 1.5 generation, November 14, 2017.
68 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 46.
69 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 39.

This description shows their distinction from the previous waves of emigration in the sense of both cultural and political superiority, because they carried a strong national identity. And the term "state-building emigration" insists that they were only striving for an independent and free country, while disregarding that this country had been based on the crimes of extermination of whole groups who were not ethnic Croats or the killings of those—even other Croats—who did not support the Ustaša regime.

He then stresses that their being highly educated enabled them to overcome language difficulties faster than the earlier waves, although at first they had to do hard physical work. Although a large number of Croatian exiles had a high level of education, due to the language barrier they could not work in their professions in which "they did not lift anything heavier than a pencil."[70] "It was painful to watch our respected intellectuals unload coal, push wheelbarrows, transfer heavy iron bars, climb scaffolding, professors clean classrooms, and doctors mix plaster. Because no one's school degrees or academic titles were recognized."[71] They worked mainly on construction sites at General Paz Avenue, the Ezeiza Airport, and workers' settlements built during the first Perón presidential term (1946–55), such as Barrio Perón. Some went to Patagonia where there was work and a Croatian colony: "My mom and another Croatian woman were handwashing for all the *paisanos* (compatriots) … she sewed shirts and underwear, she did some repairs and washed the laundry, and did everything manually."[72] They set up a restaurant where the children also helped. In their free time they went to the beach and played with other Croatian children. Later they came back to Buenos Aires where their parents always worked with Croats.[73]

As soon as they learned the language, they opened construction companies,[74] again employing Croats. Many learned the construction trade there and later became independent. It was, along with knitting, one of the main sources of income. The lack of integration of adults was also aided by the fact that many worked for other, wealthier Croats who established knitting factories. The first to establish a small knitting factory was Josip Stürmer in Villa Martelli on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. It soon became a knitting school and a hotbed for further knitting workshops. This is how the craft spread through the community. Croats (mostly men) soon started to

70 Ozanic, *Guenechen*, 40.

71 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 44.

72 Interview with Š.N. (born 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 11, 2018.

73 Interview with V.N. (born 1947), the 1.5 generation, August 24, 2018.

74 Maja Lukač de Stier, "Aportes de la colectividad croata a la República Argentina," *Studia Croatica* 102 (1986), http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/102/102.htm#_Toc268598781.

support themselves with their own shops and factories or used these as an additional source of income.[75] The textile industry was until then typically owned by Jewish immigrants who arrived in Argentina in the 1930s.[76]

The most relevant knitting factory was Ivo Rojnica's Pulloverfin factory with wholesale exports, as well as his Ivolana wool mill, which opened in 1956 and 1957 respectively. In his book, he mentions his economic contribution to Argentina, along with the contributions of Ante Ivan Grljušić, owner of Empresa Constructora, which built highways and roads, although he came to Argentina in the 1930s.[77] Rojnica also highlights two other companies: INARGIND S.A., owned by Kazimir Kovačić, who was in charge of installation of industrial machines and worked with Coca Cola and other big corporations,[78] and IDECO SRL, owned by Radovan Latković, who did interior design and modular division of offices and shopping galleries and worked with many banks.[79] Both Kovačić and Latković were very active in the community. But the most revealing information in Rojnica's book begins when he writes about himself in the third person: "Born in 1915, as a twenty-year-old, he had his own shop of male garments in Dubrovnik and those who did not buy a piece of clothes in the shop 'Češki Magazin,' were not modernly dressed."[80] He then fast forwards to 1947, skipping over his role in the NDH (for that, see later chapters), and states that he:

> Came to Argentina in 1947, learned the knitting craft at the Laura Knitting Factory (Fábrica de tejidos de punto Laura). After less than a year he bought his own knitting machine by lending money from Ante Burazin from Cista (Croatia) and named his business Pulloverfin (Fábrica de tejidos de punto Pulloverfin) which grew so much that in 1956 it became a stock company (SAIC—Sociedad Anónima, Industrial y Comercial) and then expanded his business by buying a wool mill in 1957. Ivolana also became

75 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 46.

76 For more information on the Jewish community in Argentina and the textile industry, see Ranaan Rein and Igal Aisenberg, "Emprendedores sin capital: Inmigrantes judíos y la industria textil argentina, 1930–1945," *Latin American Jewish Studies* 2 no. 1 (2023): 27–42; Nerina Visacovsky, "El círculo virtuoso: de obreros judíos a fabricantes textiles argentinos (1940–1960)," in *Historia Regional. Enfoques y articulaciones para complejizar una historia nacional*, ed. Marta Bonaudo and Richard-Jorba (La Plata: UNLP, 2014), 229–50.

77 Ivo Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine i doprinos Hrvata* [An overview of the history of Argentina and the contribution of Croats] (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1974), 258.

78 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 260.

79 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 261.

80 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 262.

> a stock company (SAIC), in 1962, and in 1964 he founded a dyeing plant. In 1968 he started exporting and his company in Argentina was the first that had constant export and even expanded to the North American market … He is a member of Argentinian Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Industry, Chamber of Exporters, and Rotary Club. He is also member of ACDE–Association of Cristian Businessmen in Argentina, member of International Christian Union of Business Executives or UNIAPAC.[81]

According to the Yugoslav embassy report in 1972, "a bigger number of Ustaša officials own several houses, cars, industrial and other plants. They (apart from the Jews) have a monopole in the textile (knitting) industry in Argentina. It is estimated that they have around 700 bigger and smaller plants in Buenos Aires and provinces (mostly small plants). However, one number of richer Croats employ more than 400–500 workers, mostly coming from political emigration: Ivo Rojnica (400 workers and 300 outsourced workers); Leopold Linke (300 workers); Zlatko Dukčević, owner of dried meats industry; Josip Stürmer, knitting industry; Mirko Latković, interior design company."[82] According to this report, the same entrepreneurs' capital was estimated at millions of US dollars.

Only a handful of Croatians managed to validate their university diplomas in Argentina due to various reasons and circumstances. Academic achievements and work in their professions—or when members of the 1.5 generation or the second generation got a university degree—were especially celebrated in the Croatian émigré community in Argentina. To exemplify, I will quote the announcements from one issue of *Hrvatska misao* journal in 1963:

> On 23 December 1962, Croatian surgeon Dr. Milivoj Marušić was certified at the Faculty of Medicine of the State University in La Plata (the capital of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina). If we consider that he had to master the enormous material for the exams, with completely new terminology, at the age of sixty-four, then Dr. Marušić, along with warm congratulations on his success, also deserves the admiration of the entire Croatian public.
>
> Dr. Marušić was born on November 16, 1898, in Tučepi near Makarska. He studied high school in Šibenik, and medicine in Prague. He worked as the head of the surgical department in Mostar, Osiek and Zagreb. In 1943, he founded the PTS (Poglavnikov Tjelesni Sdrug—Poglavnik Bodyguard

81 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 262-3.

82 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, 1972 Annual Report, December 1972, 5/515–516.

> Division) Military Hospital. From the day of the assassination attempt on Dr. A. Pavelić until his departure from Argentina, he was constantly by the side of the wounded Poglavnik. He will see patients in his apartment: Sargento Cabral 1877, Florida (Bs. As.), phone. 740-7168.[83]

As we will also see later, the World War II merits of the members of the émigré community and the fact that they carried out important duties in the NDH were especially stressed in these announcements. In this case, Marušić was the personal doctor of Ante Pavelić, both in the NDH and in exile.

Here is an example of another announcement, about a member of the 1.5 generation: "Jasna Bulat, daughter of prominent Croatian politician and fighter for the independence of Croatia, Dr. Edo Bulat, graduated from the same university at the Faculty of Law and gained a degree as a state notary public (*escribano público nacional*) on 15 March this year. With this, she represents the sixth generation of an uninterrupted legal tradition in the Bulat family."[84] Here, since the woman who graduated was too young to participate in the Ustaša regime, the journal stresses her important lineage, being the daughter of an NDH minister. On the next page of the journal, other announcements mention the graduation of Miljenko Barbarić (medicine) and professor Ivo Parica (philosophy), as well as the sending of engineer Tomislav Kopsić to a research stay in Germany by the University of Bahía Blanca.[85]

Among the highly educated Croats, a group of forestry engineers worked for the Argentinian Ministry of Agriculture and Cattle as advisers and later as chiefs of technical commissions, created plans for systematization and cataloguing of Argentine woods,[86] and drafted the first forestry legislation.[87] Their scientific merit was acknowledged by the new homeland, and they were a source of pride for the community in the intergenerational transmission of memory. Rojnica lists them: Josip Balen (NDH minister of forestry and mining and rural economy), Ivica Frković (also NDH minister of forestry and mining in 1941), Makso Hranilović, Slavko Hranilović, Jure Petrak, Ivan Asančaić, Luka Poduje, Kazimir Uhrin. According to Rojnica, "as soon as they arrived in Argentina, they were immediately admitted as public servants to the Directorate General for Forests and

83 The assassination attempt was on April 10, 1957, which is discussed more in the next chapter.

84 *Hrvatska misao*, No. 30 (1963), 63.

85 *Hrvatska misao*, No. 30 (1963), 64.

86 Carmen Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Krivodol Press, 2004), 191.

87 "José Balen," *Facultad de Ciencias Forestales y Recursos Naturales, Universidad Austral de Chile*. https://www.forestal.uach.cl/exacademicos/exacademico.php?s=josip-balen

as soon as they started working, they were appointed counsellors at the Directorate."[88] This should be taken with a grain of salt, knowing that they first had to overcome the language barrier, but, in sum, they made a new plan of cataloguing and managing the forests and then were distributed around Argentina to teach other agronomy engineers the method (there was no forestry studies). They measured and catalogued around 500,000 hectares of woods from north to south Argentina.[89] While cataloguing and doing the topography of the areas, they also gave them Croatian names (see further in the text). Four of these engineers were the founders of the first faculty of forestry in Argentina.[90] Many of them either stayed at the Directorate General for Forests or worked in different provinces of Argentina either as professors or within the regional forest management directorates.

Another Croatian scientist (whom Rojnica also claims immediately started working as a scientist) from the post-World War II émigré community was agronomist Josip Crnko who worked at the Agricultural Experimental Station La Consulta at the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria—INTA) and was a renowned expert.[91] In fact, the INTA seed analysis laboratory today carries the name of José Crnko.[92] Rojnica also mentions other agronomists working at the INTA, such as Marcel Bakarčić, Ante Turica, and Jure Devčić.[93]

Among the long list of "distinguished Croats," Rojnica stresses Stjepan Horvat. Rojnica states that he arrived in Argentina on March 15, 1948, upon invitation by the Argentinian Military Geodesic institute in Buenos Aires where he worked his whole life, and that he was renown in the Americas for his scientific work.[94] However, according Stjepan Horvat, it was on priest Dominik Mandić's merit that he got to Argentina in 1948 because he secured his transport to emigration, and, after he arrived, his former student Josip Ivandić helped him continue his professional career in Argentina.[95] Therefore, it was not so smooth and automatic. Another scientist Rojnica

88 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 208.

89 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 209.

90 These were Balen, Petrak, Poduje, and Uhrin.

91 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 211–12.

92 Laboratorio de Análisis de Semillas "José Crnko" EEA La Consulta-INTA, https://labcrnko.blogspot.com/

93 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 214–18. He also listed the papers that they published as a proof.

94 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 219.

95 Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice*, 267.

mentions is Zlatko Tanodi, the geography teacher of the Blue Boys in Austria, who founded the first school of archive studies in Argentina in 1959.[96]

Most of these scientists, except for the forestry engineers' group, were not very involved in the political activities of the community. In fact, Rojnica mentions one professional who was very engaged and states that the others should follow his example—Franjo Pušković, "carrier of the medal for being the accompanying physician of the legionary Devil's Division—the 369th (Croatian) Infantry Division."[97] When he arrived in Argentina he started working as a physician in Paraná, in the province of Entre Ríos. He worked at the ministry of health as chief of biostatistics, replacing Dr. Ivo Petrić, former NDH minister of health. Later, he validated his diploma and started practicing as a gynecologist: "Many doctors forgot about their people at home and in emigration. Unlike Dr. Pušković, who proudly expresses his Croatness wherever he goes … The honest Croatian intelligence has always been with its people; it is sharing the same destiny of its people in the homeland and in emigration, looking with contempt at those who alienate from their nation," calling them Judas.[98]

Rojnica then writes about "the Croatian contribution" to the field of arts, as if it were a collective one, giving the example of a surrealist painter Zdravko Dučmelić who "held more than fifty exhibitions, and was highly awarded and praised."[99] Zdravko Dučmelić was indeed a very important artistic figure and a university professor, who worked closely with Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges and illustrated his books, and in 1977, in Buenos Aires, coauthored a book with Borges titled *Laberintos* with twenty-three reproductions of his oil paintings.[100] Rojnica gives accounts of other artistic expressions,[101] stating, for example, that "we are not lagging behind in the musical field either."[102] Similar to the Fermo camp, stressing academic and artistic achievements of selected members of the Croatian community weaves the narrative of Croats as a civilized and highly-cultured group, and distinguishes them from the earlier waves of Croatian immigration

96 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 225.

97 Vražja divizija, the Devil's Division, was a World War II Croatian legionary division in the German Wehrmacht.

98 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 232.

99 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 239.

100 Jorge Luis Borges and Zdravko Ducmelic, *Laberintos* (Buenos Aires: Joraci, 1977).

101 These include orchestra directors Ante Kopitović, Ivo Degrel, and Ana Kokša, and writers Željko Dučmelić, Mate Erić, Ilija Jurić, Enver Mehmedagić, Marijan Mikac, Vinko Nikolić, and Pero Tutavac.

102 Rojnica, *Prikaz povijesti Argentine*, 241.

with an air of superiority. The most prominent example is the Jadran choir that continued with its activities in Argentina. The many members of the community that participated in it showed how the whole community was indeed a cultured one. In the same line and with a similar title,[103] in the 1990s Sinovčić gives a similar account of the distinguished cultural figures coming from the Croatian community, also emphasizing the role of the Jadran choir.[104] And since the books by Rojnica and Sinovčić were older and written in Croatian, for newer generations who did not speak Croatian, there was a book in Spanish titled *Croats of Argentina* by a member of the 1.5 generation, Carmen Verlichak, that repeats a similar but more romanticized narrative and mentions the contributions of forestry engineers, painters, and others.[105]

The Jadran choir has been the most important cultural association, founded as the Choir of Croatian Refugees of Camp Fermo in 1945, and later renamed as Croatian Choir Jadran: "since the majority of the members had previous choir experience, they soon prepared a repertoire, all written by memory, since they did not bring sheet music,"[106] showing how cultured they were, knowing musical notes of entire compositions by heart. In Argentina the Croats first founded a male choir in Buenos Aires, and in 1948 they transformed it into the mixed Croatian Singing Choir Jadran. It was present at all the commemorative events, and they also had public concerts in representative concert halls. This tradition has been maintained until today. The place of Jadran in the memory of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina since its beginnings was defined in a speech at the celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary: "Apart from their struggle for life, bread, building homes and families, these people immediately started their cultural

103 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990*. (Croats in Argentina and their contribution to the Croatian culture: an overview of Croatian press published in Argentina from 1946 to 1990) (Buenos Aires: self- published, 1991).

104 Painters who worked in Argentina and exhibited their works were Gustav Likan, Jozo Kljaković, Žarko Šimat, Josip Crnobori, Zdravko Dučmelić, and Višnja Petrić. Piano concerts were performed by Ana Kokša, Vanda Mikac, and (as a girl, the daughter of a Croat) Ivana Adžija, and Mirko Kovačec at the organ. Tina Ivče-Čubelić, Zoran Dončević, Jasna Müller-Terrazas, Franjo Dučmelić, Fr. Aleksandar Longin, Melita Stegnar, and Nikola Kordić performed were solo singers. Composers (or conductors) were Stjepan Horvat, Ante Kopitović, Ivo Degrel, Mirko Kovačec, Marijan Kindi, Ante Ramljak Nola, Josip Bujanović, Tomislav Bulat, Vinko Leskovar, Josip Puches and brother Marijan Zlovečera, and Marija Majnarić, Jr., born in Argentina.

105 Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina*

106 Sixtieth anniversary speech, http://www.studiacroatica.org/museum/0155/015503.htm.

work, an irrefutable fact that shows the readiness and need of Croatian man for a cultural life."[107]

Jadran occupies a special place in the memory of the Croatian diaspora because it distinguished the Croats from other exiles and projects an image of their cultural superiority. This is constantly repeated in the speeches delivered on anniversaries. Jadran's role also changed over time. With the first generation gradually leaving the scene, the second and third generations resumed where they stopped, and "the main task of the Choir is to preserve Croatian community, especially its new generations, the spirit of Croatness and a tradition of big choirs from the times of the free Homeland that were very successful all around Europe. It is an imminent destiny of each emigration to experience a decay, weakening, and estrangement; therefore, only higher spiritual values, and great efforts of individuals and groups can preserve small ethnic cultural islands in a foreign sea."[108]

As a result, even after the first generation died and Croatia became independent in the 1990s, Jadran has been active through three generations. In seventy years, more than 370 persons sang in the choir: "They all formed the body and the soul of the choir; with their voices and their presence they showed the love for the homeland that they left. They transmitted this love through generations, that maintain alive the Croatian cultural heritage and generate a new culture with a mark of an immigrant who does not forget his/her roots but settles in his/her new and generous home."[109] So, the Jadran choir is the "artistic soul of our community" since "every member of the Croatian community in Buenos Aires is marked by the history of the Croatian Choir Jadran."[110]

There were also other social activities that continued from the Fermo camp, such as the Football Club Croatia which was renewed in late 1948.[111] The theatre group—in Argentina called the Theater Group of the Croatian Home Guard Youth (making reference to the political youth group that are covered more in chapter 4)—was quite active in the 1960s and 1970s. Many

107 Jose Holub, "25th anniversary," 1972, leaflet http://www.studiacroatica.org/museum/0049/0049.htm.

108 "40-ta godišnjica HPZ Jadran," fortieth anniversary of Jadran Choir, *Glasnik Hrvatskog domobrana*, Nov. 1987, no. 1.

109 Jadran choir website, https://www.asociacioncroatajadran.org/coro-jadran.

110 Branko Nadinic, August 27, 2017, speech at the concert on the occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of the Croatian Choir Jadran, Usina del Arte, Buenos Aires (personally attended and recorded by the author).

111 "Obnovljeno športsko družtvo 'Croatia' iz Ferma," *Hrvatska*, Buenos Aires, No. 28, December 1, 1948, 8.

members of the second generation participated in it, staging plays such as Moliere's *Le Médecin malgré lui*,[112] August Šenoa's *Goldsmiths Gold*,[113] or *Hasanaginica*, a folk ballad adapted to theater by Milan Ogrizović. The invitations were regularly published in Croatian newspapers, like in the case of the *Hasanaginica* premiere: "CROATIAN MEN AND WOMEN! Do come in the largest number possible to our play that will transport you in spirit to the magical parts of our proud Bosnia. PARENTS! Bring your children and familiarize them at least this way with our ancient popular traditions."[114]

Tools of Preservation of Identity and Endogamous Community

According to Sinovčić, "the situation that the fourth, state-building emigration found in these areas, and concerning the earlier Croatian immigrants, was not favorable at all, but not completely hopeless either. It was, we could say, an uncultivated field that needed workers to mow and plough it. Work on it began immediately. Without hesitation and pre-breath. We were all reapers and ploughmen. Nothing was difficult for anyone. No one complained about anything. Neither about time, nor distances, nor the type of work."[115] Sinovčić wrote the booklet in 1991, so this is clearly an idealized account of a difficult start in Argentina in hindsight, which offers a romanticized image of a community where all breathed as one.

They rapidly established a nursery, youth organizations, assistance and cultural associations, and political parties. In Argentina, they continued and expanded the activities initiated in Fermo, with Sunday Mass serving as the main meeting point. Their political activity was accompanied by prolific publishing. There was at least a dozen newspapers published at that time; many of them continued to be published until the mid-1980s. The community of Croatian political émigrés also maintained the tradition of commemorating April 10, the anniversary of the establishment of the NDH, and May 15, the date of the Bleiburg postwar killings. These commemorations are still observed today, eighty years after the arrival of the Croatian refugees in Argentina, through the intergenerational transmission of memory (see chapters 4 and 5).

112 "Pod vodstvom Marija Majnarića, izvela je 16. 3. o. g. kazališna grupa Hrvatske Domobranske Mladeži u Buenos Airesu Molieovu komediju 'Silom liečnik,'" *Hrvatska Misao*, No. 30/1963, 64.

113 "Velebna kazališna svečanost," *Hrvatska*, November 6, 1964, 5.

114 *Hrvatska*, May 15, 1961, 1.

115 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 53.

The political activities and commemorations are a significant part of the puzzle that composes the structure and tools of preservation of the collective memory and identity. But they would not have been possible without the social pillars of the community. In the first period, since they believed that they would return soon, and to preserve their identity, the diaspora created a Croatian microcosm in exile relying on tools such as the religious, educational, cultural, and social institutions, and endogamic marriages. The first step was creating and building Croatian clubs:

> In mid-1949, one of the most significant successes was achieved—the purchase of our own house—*Dom* in the very center of Buenos Aires, at 1241 Salta Street (near one of the main railway stations and next to the subway and several bus stops line in front of the house itself). From then on, all our political and social work will take place in it (sometimes Mass will be celebrated), for which until then we used the cramped premises of the Croatian Home Guard,[116] that is, the rather distant reception home in Monte Street, or we used (for lectures, singing rehearsals, theater performances, social meetings, etc.) various halls of church buildings, which were made available to us by pastors and leaders of Catholic organizations kindly and mostly free of charge.[117]

The building was purchased again by the same Argentinian businessman, José Balbiani, who gave them the Monte Street building, and it had nineteen bigger and six smaller rooms. All the then Croatian associations moved into it, and a bar was opened. It was given the official name: "Hrvatski dom, d.d." (Croatian Home, Ltd.). Hrvatski dom d.d. later built two branches, one in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Justo, and the other in the city of Córdoba, 700 km northwest of Buenos Aires.

With time, Croatian émigrés built or bought six more buildings: three in Buenos Aires (the Croatian-Argentine Cultural Club, the Croatian Religious Center "St. Nikola Tavelić," and the HOP—Croatian Liberation Movement [see chapter 4]), two in San Justo (the Croatian National Resistance—see chapter 4, the Croatian Religious Center "St. Leopold Bogdan Mandić") and one in Villa Martelli (the Croatian Cooperative). There were also numerous places of worship and religious institutions: monasteries, churches, and

116 See more in chapter 4

117 "Dom" means "home" in Croatian; it refers to Croatian centers. Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 60–61.

schools were built by Croatian monks and nuns not only in Buenos Aires and its suburbs, but throughout Argentina.[118]

Dozens of Croatian girls became boarding pupils at the School of Christ the King in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, where the Croatian Sisters of Mercy of St Vincent de Paul worked.[119] As one member of the 1.5 generation whom I interviewed said, they were happy because they were reunited with other *Fermašice* (Fermo camp girls).[120] Others were sent to other boarding schools held by Croatian priests, in Chovet and Mar Chiquita, because their parents could not take care of them and work. They soon learned Spanish: "When I finally understood everything, in March 1949, I was so happy."[121]

Croatian Franciscans regularly published their ads in the community's newspaper, reflecting the spirit of maintenance of national identity. For instance: "CROATIAN PARENTS! Have you secured the religious and national education of your children? Croatian Franciscans have a foundation, Croatian Home of St. Anthony in Miramar (Córdoba) where they teach both Argentinian and Croatian subjects. There are still vacancies."[122] Or for summer school: "CROATIAN PARENTS! Croatian Franciscans are expecting your child, at the shores of the sea and with the sound of the waves of Mar Chiquita, to educate them and evoke the sound of the waves of our blue Adriatic and glorious Croatia's past. Enroll your child in the only Croatian institute, where s/he will learn the mother tongue and study the history of his/her people and the homeland Croatia."[123] Not all the children went to a Croatian boarding school. They spoke Croatian at home and learned Spanish on the streets with other children before school. Those who were older had to start school immediately, without previously speaking Spanish: while some temporarily resorted to the earlier knowledge of Italian learned in the camps,[124] others had to improvise: "It was very hard because children are cruel. During the first break I was in the courtyard leaning against the wall and the whole school started to ask me questions. I was so desperate I repeated the only thing I knew in Spanish: 'no comprendo el español.' At a certain point I got so desperate that I started to answer in Croatian. Later

118 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 61.
119 According to the school's registry books from 1948 to 1966.
120 Interview with T.K. (born in 1935), September 10, 2018.
121 Interview with T.K. (born in 1935), September 10, 2018.
122 *Hrvatska*, February 9, 1955, 6.
123 *Hrvatska*, January 16, 1957, 7.
124 Interview with T.K. (born in 1935), September 10, 2018.

I integrated because I played football well, nobody could score a goal with me as a goalkeeper. Everybody started to like me!"[125]

The children of high NDH officials who left Croatia in 1944 were enrolled in German schools and one went to an elite school due to his father's earlier connections. But he lived far away, so he would get off the bus earlier and walk to school, because all the rest would come with chauffeurs: "I had a lot of friends, but I was living in Adrogué,[126] and they were living in Recoleta.[127] It was a bad period, ten not-so-nice years. I lived two very different realities."[128] One recalls that "One day my mum got into a row with the teacher who said we were Yugoslavs and mum could not believe that she didn't know where Croatia was, so she took me out of that school."[129] Anything labeled as Yugoslav was categorically rejected. They all spoke Croatian at home and learned Spanish on the streets with other children before school. They started to integrate into society when they started school.

On the other hand, most of the adults or parents never fully integrated into society and never managed to speak Spanish properly, or at all: "My father learned Spanish like all the adult Croats—half-way. When he was sick and dying, he only spoke Croatian."[130] Others had similar stories: "Mom didn't learn Spanish, she needed help for everything, so my older sister took charge of everything."[131] "My mum spoke excellent German, Italian and Croatian, and her Spanish was poor. We only spoke Croatian at home, and we were living in a Croatian block."[132] This lack of integration was aided by the fact that they worked for other, wealthier Croats who established knitting factories.[133] This even led some of them to a sort of self-isolation: "Dad was the only exile, he was listening to Radio Zagreb all the time. He did not integrate at all. I was the only one who completely integrated in the society. My dad was completely disconnected from the society, apart from the family ties, he was low-spirited and not very active so he did not think he could not start anew, with a new language and with his profession as a lawyer."[134] This also influenced children, because they lived two different realities at home and in society.

125 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), July 30, 2018.
126 On the outskirts of Buenos Aires.
127 An elite neighborhood close to the city center.
128 Interview with M.P. (born in 1940), August 27, 2018.
129 Interview with Š.N. (born in 1945), August 11, 2018.
130 Interview with V.N. (born in 1947), August 24, 2018.
131 Interview with M.M.S. (born in 1942), July 31, 2018.
132 Interview with M.G. (born in 1945), August 1, 2018.
133 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 46.
134 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), July 30, 2018.

Some of them lived their childhood with a great burden of their parents' political engagement in exile: "I had a very patriotic upbringing. My parents would repeat: 'never forget that you come from a very known family'. But what did that mean 10,000 km away from Croatia, a country that ceased to exist?"[135] Another, Toni Vrancic, whose father Vjekoslav Vrančić was one of the most prominent figures in the political émigré community in Argentina,

> felt that my father put Croatia ahead of his family. This created a barrier between us, everything that had to do with politics and Croatia. This is why I refused to accompany him in his permanent political activity in favor of Croatia. We never talked about what he wanted to achieve with his activity in Argentina in favor of Croatia, for the rest of his life. And he did not introduce us to the Croatian community he attended, he respected our freedom and our idiosyncrasy, I would say with disillusionment and a bit of pain. He did not try to generate situations for us to be seduced by beautiful Croatian young ladies, and there were a lot of them. My repudiation was extended to the study and use of Croatian language. We spoke German at home.[136]

Some also arrived later and reunited with their fathers that they barely knew. One woman born in 1942 arrived in Argentina in 1955 and met her father after ten years. She said:

> I was expecting that America was going to be something else, something beautiful. I thought that fried chickens were going to fall from the sky. I remember that dad was waiting for us at the Retiro train station, and he was a stranger to me. We were travelling through all the beautiful neighborhoods with beautiful houses, and I was wondering which one of these houses was ours. But then we got off at the last station and had to take the bus. And then we came to our street, it wasn't paved and our house was very modest, we did not have light, it had adobe floor. To come all the way from Borovo, leave everything, our friends, our family … We had parquet flooring in school and central heating back home. I started to cry.

(And she started to cry during the interview). "When they [the adult men] came here, if he immediately bought a decent house, the others would tell

135 Interview with S.E.K. (born in 1942), November 14, 2017.
136 Antonio Vrancic, *Marcapasos* (Buenos Aires: Dunken, 2018), 42.

him: what kind of a Croat are you, are you thinking of staying? And we were used to having nice housing. It was really hard for me, but nobody asked me how I felt."[137]

The patterns of endogamous community are also visible in the interaction with(in) the community. They regularly socialized at Hrvatski dom and participated in choir, theatre, or folklore groups, while youngsters were members of the Croatian Youth (Hrvatska mladež). The youth started to organize balls and meetings but also started to engage politically.[138] Girls met their future husbands there and their in-laws also married Croats from the Youth, which points to the dynamics of homogenous community formation based on endogamic marriages. While most of them described this as a natural course of events due to the constant interaction within the group, some had a traumatic experience: "I could not bring anyone home if he/she wasn't a Croat … The boys from Dom were like brothers for me … and I ended up marrying one of them. At the church wedding, I wanted to run away. But then I thought, no, it would be a shame for our parents. I will get a divorce someday." She then continued the story reinterpreted from the current times of struggle for women's rights in Argentina, protesting for abortion and against femicides. "You know that babies can be born out of rape? This is how my son was born. He is now fifty-one years old. I said I would get a divorce one day, and I did. My mom said that it was a disgrace for the family and that I was a bad daughter. My father let me come back home."[139] She realized that while she could not have refused it then, she had not consented to sexual intercourse with her husband, and that she had been raped. Another mentioned that she married a Croat, and that her brother-in-law also married a Croat, but was forced into it: "they hooked him up with a mentally ill girl, he was in love with her sister, but they made him marry the sick one."[140]

The marriages, whether voluntary or forced, were certainly celebrated by the community, and regularly published in its newspapers since 1948, usually titled as "A Croatian wedding," after which they would stress and celebrate the activity of the groom and bride in the NDH and in exile. There are many, but to exemplify: "A Croatian wedding. On 1 Oct 1955 Mr. Fabijan Jukić married Miss Maria Osepa Lupino in the Church of St Anthony in Lanús. Mr Jukić is known to many as a courageous fighter for our state, and

137 Interview with M.S. (born in 1942), November 27, 2017.

138 Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina*, 183.

139 Interview with M.G. (born in 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 1, 2018.

140 Interview with Š.N. (born in 1945), the 1.5 generation, August 11, 2018.

as an Ustaša colonel he participated in the glorious Black Legion.[141] He was wounded many times in fight, but he went back and fought more decisively against the enemy as soon as he recovered."[142] Or:

> A Croatian wedding. On 21 September 1957 our brother Ante Starčević married Marija Zorka Petrović, known for his patriotic activities to the whole Croatian community in Argentina … there has not been an important patriotic activity where he has not participated, fatigueless worker and sincere friend … The patriotic work he did in the homeland among the ranks of Križari and Starčević university youth and his eager fulfilment of patriotic duty during the whole NDH remains in the memory of everyone who knows him from the homeland. In the defense of home and Croatian statehood he lost his father, mother, and brother.[143]

By the mid-1960s, when the second generation started getting married, they would stress their activity in the community and their NDH lineage. For instance:

> A Croatian wedding, between Ante Vodopija, son of Croatian officer who died during the withdrawal in 1945, and Marija Jerbić, daughter of Nikola Jerbić, known Croatian nationalist and distinguished fighter among students lines in the renewal of the Independent State of Croatia at the University of Zagreb, and Ines Sušić, also granddaughter of late Professor Sušić … Congratulations to the happy parents and besides congratulations and wishes for a happy life to the newlyweds, we remind them to always remember that they are Croats and that they should stay that way, and as such, they should give their contribution to the altar for the happiness and freedom of Croatian people and homeland.[144]

In fact, if we drew a family tree of the community, we would discover that they are all somehow related through marriages of the second generation.

141 The official name was the 1st Infantry Active Brigade, an elite Ustaša militia infantry brigade composed of Muslims and Croats from eastern Bosnia. It became known for its brutality and crimes against Serb civilians and its fearsome commanders, Jure Francetić and Rafael Boban.
142 *Hrvatska*, March 21, 1956, 6.
143 *Hrvatska*, October 24, 1957, 6. Starčević university youth were of the Ustaša movement.
144 *Hrvatska*, Nov 28, 1967, 7. Miroslav Sušić was a World War II governor of the great county of Vinodol and Podgorje, with the seat in Senj in 1941, and he retired in the autumn of 1941. He left Croatia in late 1944 and eventually ended in Argentina where he died in 1961. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 372–73.

Through informal conversations with the members of the community, I realized that certain social and political statuses were respected in these marriages.

Also, when a member of the Croatian community would die, their (or their husband's) merits would be stressed: "Ana Devčić, born Došen was one of those Croatian women who knew how to heroically endure all the adversities that the struggle for the political independence of Croatia inevitably imposed on those who participated in it. The wife of Ivan Pivac-Devčić, and the daughter-in-law of the Ustaša mother Manda, she went through her Way of the Cross with her forehead held high, and only a severe and incurable illness managed to tear her away from her Ivan and her six children."[145] The "particular" merit of this woman was that she was the wife of an Ustaša and the daughter-in-law of the "Ustaša mother," a woman who gave birth to an Ustaša.

We can observe that all the mechanisms, including endogamic marriages, especially in the first decades, served as activities of a closed group to preserve themselves from trauma. As Sztompka points out, the trauma became the social panorama through which they "defined and redefined their place in the world, thus the memory of the trauma began to form part of the core values, rules and central expectations of the community."[146] This strength of trauma is reflected in the case of engineer Ivica Frković, who worked as a cartographer of Argentine forests in the ministry of agriculture and livestock. While in charge of mapping Cuartel Pilcún, Patagonia, in 1952, he left the mark of his personal Bleiburg trauma and the collective community trauma on Argentine geography: he named two lagoons Jasna and Mirna, after his daughters who died in the Bleiburg postwar killings, and two streams Lika (where he was born) and Bosnia,[147] as well as small rivers Budac (Budak), Mime, named after the late Mile Budak,[148] and Kavran group member Mime Rosandić, and other creeks named after Croatian rivers: Corana (Korana), Cupa (Kupa), Cetina, Bosut, Una, Mura, Sava, Drava, and Drina.[149]

145 *Hrvatska misao*, 30/1963, 64.

146 Piotr Sztompka, "Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change," *European Journal of Social Theory* 3, no. 4 (2000): 449–466, 457.

147 Map of Cuartel Pilcún, Province of Neuquén. Directorate of Forest Economy, National Forest Administration, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, January–April 1952, (signed: Eng. Joss- Eng. Ivica Frković).

148 Budak was a prominent member of the Ustaša movement since its beginnings, an NDH era minister of culture and education, and later NDH ambassador to Germany and minister of foreign affairs, who then went into retirement in 1943. He was extradited to Yugoslavia from Austria on May 18, 1945, and was soon tried and sentenced to death.

149 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 45.

The preservation of identity and language through educational, cultural, and religious activities have been maintained to this day and up to the fourth generation, for they serve as tools to strengthen the link with the homeland and their identity as Croats, born in Argentina because of the exile. However, a particular narrative was transmitted through educational activities, the one portraying the NDH as a realization of a dream of an independent and free Croatia, while completely silencing the crimes and the atrocities committed under and in the name of the NDH, thus later rejecting any counternarrative as a Yugoslav, Serb, and Communist complot.

The trauma is also perpetuated in the community and family environment with the transmission of memory by giving children and grandchildren the names of the relatives who disappeared in Bleiburg. Thus, in later generations, indelible marks are created since they carry the legacy of their ancestors. For instance, Tomislav Frković, grandson of the above-mentioned Ivica Frković, named his daughter Jasna in memory of his then sixteen-year-old aunt killed in the Bleiburg postwar killings.[150] These pillars of the Croatian émigré community served in the preservation of their identity. But apart from that, they were very politically active, a topic that will be discussed in the next chapter.

150 Tomislav Frkovic, "Testimonio familiar acerca del dramatico destino de las jovenes Mirna y Jasna Frkovic. Rostros de un genocidio," UACRA Facebook page, May 13, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=558908720956728&id=199000083614262&substory_index=0.

4. Political and Publishing Activities

Abstract: The fourth chapter treats political and publishing activities, the internal political relations within the community over time, the relationship with local politics, and the channels used for lobbying and forming strategic alliances with local political stakeholders and networking with the Croatian diaspora worldwide. It also shows their interactions with the Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires. Special attention is paid to the violent actions undertaken mostly by Croatian émigré youth from the 1960s to 1980s.

Keywords: political parties, newspapers, Argentinean politics, alliances, violent actions

Sinovčić concludes his booklet on the contribution of Croats in Argentina with the following words: "All the work of the Croatian state-building emigration … was aiming at the liberation of Croatia and the re-establishment of Croatian state sovereignty, which could not have been expected otherwise since the April 10 emigration."[1] Such intense activity happened because they were a community of political exiles who believed that they would soon return to their homeland and because of the fact that almost the entire NDH political and military leadership had settled in Argentina.[2]

Since they were enjoying the protection of Perón's government and were safe from extradition to Yugoslavia, as a sign of loyalty the NDH leadership joined the Nationalist Liberation Alliance (Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista—ALN), President Perón's shock troop and armed wing of the Argentinian Nacionalista far-right philo-fascist movement. It was founded in 1937 by Juan Queraltó, and from 1953 to 1955 it was led by Guillermo Patricio Kelly. Pavelić openly maintained good relations with the ALN and both Queraltó

1 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990* (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1991), 64–65.

2 Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2 vols. (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1983).

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-5

and Kelly, and prominent NDH leading officials held conferences at the ALN headquarters as distinguished guests. After Perón broke with the Catholic church in 1955, the ALN (with Croatian troops included) burned various churches and even attempted to burn down the Buenos Aires Cathedral. The movement was crushed and its headquarters in the center of Buenos Aires were bombed and demolished on September 21, 1955, with the coup d'etat called the Liberating Revolution (Revolución Libertadora), which ousted Perón.[3] However, the Ustaša continued to enjoy the government's protection, although some, such as Edo Bulat,[4] were imprisoned immediately after Perón's ousting according to Ivo Rojnica, who claims that this was "due to a denouncement of the Yugoslav embassy," not because of the attacks.[5] In that period Croatian troops also participated in the Peronist Movement of Foreigners (Movimiento Peronista para los Extranjeros—MPE), an organization of thirty-two communities in Argentina loyal to Perón, led by a German Gustav Müller.[6]

Also, in this period we observe the collaboration of Ante Pavelić under the pseudonym A.S. Mrzlodolski, "author of essays on Marxism",[7] with *Dinámica Social* monthly, published by the Center for Economic and Social Studies (Centro de Estudios Económico Sociales—CEES), founded by Carlo Scorza, the last secretary of the Italian National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista). Celina Albornoz finds that there was a nexus between *Dinámica Social* and Italian neofascism after World War II. Other contributors of *Dinámica Social* were Pierre Daye, Belgian collaborationist and one of the key figures of the Argentinian Society for the Reception of Europeans (Sociedad Argentina de Recepción de Europeos), Manuel Fraga Iribarne, Spanish politician and high official under Franco, former SS member William Sassen (Dutch), Vichy collaborationist Jacques Marie De Mahieu, Romanian writer Vintila Horia, who was a diplomat for the Romanian embassy in Rome

3 Rubén Furman, *Puños y pistolas: La extraña historia de la Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2014), Kindle version, loc. 355 and 385.

4 Bulat was an NDH era minister for Dalmatia in 1941, and later Ustaša commissioner for Dalmatia. He was the NDH ambassador to Romania (Aug 1941 to January 1942), then the director of the Croatian Publishing Institute, and in 1943 an NDH government member and minister for liberated areas. He also worked on the memorandum to the Allies in 1945. Zdravko Dizdar et al., eds., *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 57–58.

5 Embassy of the Republic of Croatia to the Argentine Republic, Rojnica's proposal for posthumous decoration of the Republic of Croatia, August 23, 1994, HR–HDA–1741. Archives of the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman.

6 Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* (London: Granta Books, 2002), e-book version, 116.

7 Summary, *Dinámica Social,* January 1951, Year 1, No.5, 3.

during World War II, Mario Amadeo, the first minister of foreign affairs of the Liberating Revolution, and Juan Carlos Goyeneche, Argentinian nationalist politician and Nazi sympathizer and also press secretary of the government of the Liberating Revolution that ousted Perón.[8]

After the fall of Perón in 1955 and the death of Pavelić in 1959, as well as the consequent fight for succession and the split of the most important party, the Croatian Liberation Movement (Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret—HOP), direct links between the first generation and other fascists who found refuge in Argentina disappeared, while the anti-Communist position of the Croatian community became predominant. Apart from being aligned with Argentina's military dictatorships, they started participating in local anti-Communist alliances, such as FAEDA, the Argentine Federation of Democratic Anti-Communist Organizations (Federación Argentina de Entidades Democráticas Anticomunistas), one of the most important anti-Communist organization in Argentina in the sixties.[9] When FAEDA organized the first anti-Communist congress in Argentina in October 1963, it was attended by a Croatian delegation made of four members: two belonging to the first generation, HOP members Ivan Asančajić and Šćepa Barbarić, and two representatives of the youth, Adriana Tevšić and Miron Begić.[10] Many infiltrated local intelligence services, police, and other institutions.

Although there are some links with philo-fascist networks in the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, for this émigré community that was politically active the first and main objective was to destroy socialist Yugoslavia. In the Cold War context in Argentina, alongside many anti-Communist alliances and military dictatorships, they managed to re-signify themselves as anti-Communists and eventually as freedom-loving democrats. Also, as opposed to Western European fascist exiles in Argentina, it was easier for the Croatian émigré community to reframe themselves as victims and a democratic opposition since the regime at home was Communist. There were also other anti-Communist associations coming from Yugoslavia, such as the Slovene or the Serbian *četnik* (royalist) "enemy emigration" (*neprijateljska*

8 Celina Albornoz, "'Os Mussolini não nascem todos os dias.' A revista Dinámica Social: um caso de neofascismo transatlântico," in *Pensar as direitas na América Latina*, ed. Ernesto Bohoslavsky et al. (São Paulo: Alameda 2019), 461–81.

9 Ernesto Bohoslavsky et al., "Juventudes conservadoras en los años sesenta en Argentina, Chile y Uruguay," in *El pensamiento conservador y derechista en América Latina, España y Portugal, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Fabio Kolar and Ulrich Mücke (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2019), 289–312.

10 "FAEDA, Hrvatska na prvom argentinskom protukomunističkom saboru," *Hrvatska*, Christmas 1963, Year XVI, No. 13–14 (359–360), 6.

emigracija), as labeled by Yugoslavia, but the Croatian group was by far the most numerous and the most problematic one for Argentinian-Yugoslav relations.

As a result, according to the 1972 report of the Yugoslav embassy, "Ever since their arrival to Argentina this enemy group started its anti-Communist propaganda … This emigration managed, as nowhere in the world, to treat Yugoslavia as a country of the Warsaw pact, to talk about Yugoslavia as a country behind the Iron Curtain, and to obstruct cooperation between Argentina and Yugoslavia. It has managed to get accepted as it presented itself as a 'political nationalist movement' and they aligned themselves with the anti-Communist movement."[11] They represented a big stumbling block in relations between Yugoslavia and Argentina, the most important being the extradition of Ante Pavelić. Yugoslavia started to ask for the extradition of Pavelić since 1951, but Perón's Argentina found every possible way to elude or refuse it: that they did not know his whereabouts, that they do not recognize the accusations for political crimes, that they feared that he would not have a fair trial and he would be executed when the death penalty was not provided by Argentinian law, and finally that there was no bilateral agreement on extradition.

After Perón was ousted with a coup d'etat in 1955, and because his shock troops engaged in burning churches along with the Ustaša, Ante Pavelić and his position were questioned, and the diaspora feared for his persecution. Military dictatorship was installed, and they were all anti-Peronists, but also anti-Communists. That gave way to a campaign directed to the ministry of foreign affairs, or the interior, or to the de facto President Lonardi, against the prosecution of Ante Pavelić in 1955, guaranteeing that "he was neither anti-Catholic nor anti-Argentinian."[12] The letters were mostly sent by Croatian associations from different countries. For instance, the Croatian community of Bolivia sent a letter to the minister of interior and justice, "protesting against maneuvers and false accusations made by Yugoslav atheists against Croatian Catholics and their leader Ante Pavelich."[13] The most important letter among those is the one sent by the Archbishop of Sarajevo, Ivan Šarić, who was in exile in Spain, "stating before the whole world: that the Catholic church has never been so protected and its yearnings to spread the truth

11 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/478.

12 MRECIC, Ministry of Interior and Justice, 1955, Mesa de entrada y salida no. 60205; Letra L, Seccion DGS, Folio 86; MRECIC; No. 58499, Iniciador San Pablo Brasil Comité Croata en el Exilio, Protestas por persecución del Dr. Ante Pavelic y se proteja a croatas emigrantes, Folio 53.

13 October 28, 1955, No. 229 177, folio 2.

everywhere have never been more protected than under His Excellency [Ante Pavelić]." He concluded the letter by saying that all the Croatian Catholics could subscribe to it and sent his "episcopal blessing."[14] The campaign is also a proof of coordination of the network of the Croatian émigré community worldwide. On another note, and as stated in chapter 1, this issue was also used for internal disputes in 1956 when Srećko Rover from Australia accused Pavelić of carrying out pro-Peronist policies and burning churches, which gave way to the counteraccusation of Pavelić against Rover for betraying the Kavran group.

Since the ousting of Perón, the country was de-Peronised and Peronism was banned by decree on March 9, 1956,[15] so all the immigrant associations, Croatian political émigré community included, were under scrutiny of the intelligence services to detect if there were any remnants of Peronism. For the Croatian Home Guard and other associations, although in the earlier intelligence screenings they were deemed as "fervorous admirers of President Perón," after 1955 they were assessed as "with solid morality concepts" and "with democratic and anti-Peronist inclinations."[16] Therefore, Pavelić was safe even under the Liberating Revolution regime and military dictatorship of Pedro Aramburu, while the Yugoslav embassy insisted on the extradition, showing that the whereabouts were known to Argentinian institutions. In parallel, the embassy was awaiting the arrival of a democratically elected government, and it met with political actors, preparing the ground for Pavelić's extradition when a favorable political option would come to power. Such was the case of a meeting in May 1957 with Néstor O. Grancelli, prominent member of the Radical Civic Union (Unión Cívica Radical), whose candidate Arturo Frondizi was elected president in 1958. At the end of the meeting, Grancelli "jokingly said that if they come to power, they will give him to us and we don't even have to take him back to Yugoslavia, but we can shoot him here already."[17]

On April 10, 1957, on the sixteenth anniversary of the proclamation of the NDH, on Pavelić's way home just a couple of blocks before reaching his

14 MRECIC, Ministry of Interior and Justice, Section DGS 1955, Registro de Entradas y Salidas, No. 60205, Initiator: La Defensa del Hogar Croata, Letter by Ivan Šarić to Ante Pavelić October 15, 1955, MRECIC, folio 87.

15 Official Gazette of the Argentine Republic – BOE RA, Decreto-ley 4161, del 9 de marzo de 1956. Prohíbese el Uso de Elementos y Nombres que Lesionaban la Democracia Argentina.

16 Archives DIPPBA- Legajo 146. Matanza 1era, Colectividad croata- la Defensa del Hogar Croata.

17 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1957, F.4, 420092, Note from a meeting between secretary of the Embassy Momčilo Vučeković and Miodrag Radović with Néstor O. Grancelli, May 16, 1957.

house in El Palomar on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, a Montenegrin Četnik Blagoje Jovović shot him with two bullets.[18] The assassination attempt had two outcomes: while Yugoslavia publicly insisted that it requested his extradition already in 1951 for war crimes, Ante Pavelić gave several interviews to journalists claiming that he was a target of the Yugoslav secret services. In an interview to *La Prensa* on April 12, 1957, he was photographed in his bed showing a bloody shirt.[19] This gave way to his exposure, and the press started to write massively about Pavelić and the NDH regime. As many as 108 articles were published by the main Argentinian newspapers on Pavelić (with or without the help of the Yugoslav embassy) as a war criminal and the crimes of the NDH, and as a result by the end of April an arrest order was issued.[20] This time, the indictment sent by Yugoslavia was not for war crimes or as a political criminal, due in part to the rejection of extradition on that basis, but also because a similar case against Andrija Artuković, NDH minister, failed in the US.[21] Therefore, this time Yugoslavia requested Pavelić's extradition for common crimes, basing its request on Argentinian criminal code.[22]

This led to another, even more organized campaign against his extradition, with the Croatian émigré and anti-Communist worldwide network sending letters to the de facto president, General Aramburu, or through the ministry of foreign affairs. The ministry of foreign affairs informed the Yugoslav embassy that they received hundreds of requests from all over the world, which showed that Ante Pavelić was the leader of the Croatian people. Croats, whether individually or as associations—from locations ranging from Tasmania, Australia, Canada, France, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain (Yorkshire, Derby, Birmingham), Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, and Chile—flooded Argentinian authorities with letters requesting the end of persecution of Pavelić, claiming that he was an innocent, falsely accused anticommunist and resolute fighter for Croatia's freedom and independence. The letters, if thoroughly studied, would make up a solid database of the worldwide Croatian political émigré community, and the Yugoslav intelligence services would have been very happy if they could have gotten all the names and addresses.

Not only Croats protested against Pavelić's extradition. There were also associations of Romanians in Spain and Chile, Latvians, Hungarians, Slovenes,

18 Milorad T. Ćulafić, *Argentinski osvetnici. Atentat na Antu Pavelića* (Belgrade: Jasen, 2016).
19 "Ante Pavelic fue herido a balazos al llegar a su casa a Palomar," *La Prensa*, April 12, 1957, 4.
20 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1957, F.4, 411447.
21 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1957, F.4, 48452.
22 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1957, F.4, 48388.

and Ukrainians in Chile. Also, the Nationalist Party of Mexico (Salvador Rivero Martínez, Jefe Nacional) advocated against Pavelić's extradition, as did the Central Committee of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN) in a letter signed by its president, Jaroslaw Stetzko, member of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and interim prime minister of independent Ukraine in 1941, General Secretary Prince Niko Nakashidze of Georgia, and Chief of Press Service Dimiter Waltscheff, former (World War II) secretary of state of Bulgaria. In a similar vein, a local anti-Communist alliance—Confederación Interamericana Comunista para la Defensa del Continente (Inter-American Communist Confederation for the Defense of the Continent, whose headquarters were at the same address as *Hrvatski dom*)—sent a letter with signatures on behalf of Albania, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, Belarus, Slovenia, Croatia, and the Caucasus Union of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Northern Caucasus.[23] Former Romanian minister (from World War II) Grigore Manoilescu wrote a letter from Mallorca, Spain to President Aramburu. In it, he states that he had been responsible for Pavelic's arrival in Argentina nine years prior, when they met in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, while they were both asylum seekers and that he convinced him then that he should go to Argentina where he would enjoy the right to asylum, and that he hoped that right would continue.[24]

There were a few letters insisting on complying with the extradition request, such as those written by the Coordination of Israelite Associations in Argentina (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas de Argentina – DAIA)) and the Committee of Yugoslav residents in Argentina. Within this group of petitioners was Vladeta Milićević, who signed as a "former minister," a Serbian royalist and minister of interior of the royal Yugoslav government in exile residing in Paris, reminding that Pavelić was sentenced to death by the French justice for the assassination of the French minister of foreign affairs Louis Barthou and the Yugoslav King Alexander on October 9, 1934 and that Milićević, as the then chief of police of King Alexander was a witness at the trial in Aix-en-Provence, insisting that Ante Pavelić was "an intimate collaborator of the former President Perón," offering himself as a witness.[25]

23 MRECIC, Box: AH/002, Date: 1947–1994, Collection: 118 Extradición de Nazis (Extradition of Nazis), Tema: Integrantes de la Ustacha (Members of the Ustaša). Pavelic, Eichmann. S. Topográfica (topographic signature): C17-A59; Folder year 1957; Subject: Yugoslavia, Ante Pavelic 1.

24 MRECIC, Box: AH/002, Date: 1947–1994, Collection: 118 Extradition of Nazis, Topic: Integrantes de la Ustacha. Pavelic, Eichmann. S Topográfica (topographic signature): C17-A59; Folder year 1957, May 21, 1957, sent to the President of Argentine Republic.

25 MRECIC, Box: AH/002, Date: 1947–1994, Collection: 118 Extradition of Nazis, Topic: Integrantes de la Ustacha. Pavelic, Eichmann. S Topográfica (topographic signature): C17-A59; Folder year 1957, April 15, 1957, sent to the Ambassador of Argentinian Republic to Paris.

Regarding the "Yugoslav insisting," Argentinian ambassador Roigt wrote a letter to the Argentinian ministry of foreign affairs saying that "Italian and German Ambassadors to Yugoslavia worried because this could bring to light again the behind-the-scenes interventions of fascism and Nazism in the formation of the ephemeral Croatian State … there is no political sense in reopening ten years later a process that is better to leave to the oblivion where it already was. In my opinion, to explain such a move, we should consider the amount of hatred that they have to the man they hold responsible for that many massacres."[26]

Pavelić was supposedly informed about the arrest warrant three days in advance, so he fled Buenos Aires to Patagonia. His escape was a huge blow for Yugoslavia, and it led to protests before Argentinian institutions, who blamed Yugoslav authorities for mishandling the case and giving it too much publicity that enabled Pavelić to flee the arrest.[27] However, it is a fact that in 1957 Yugoslavia and Argentina still did not have a bilateral agreement on extradition.[28]

He crossed the border in Patagonia on July 23 to Chile, Punta Arenas, and then he spent four months in Santiago de Chile in a house of one of his supporters.[29] On November 29, 1957, he arrived in Madrid, in Franco's Spain where he lived until his death on December 28, 1959 at the German hospital in Madrid. He was buried on December 31 at the San Isidro Cemetery in Madrid. The burial was attended by several representatives from the Croatian political émigré community, mostly from his Croatian Liberation Movement, but some were advised not to attend it because it was a par excellence event for the Yugoslav intelligence to detect a "who's who of the anti-Yugoslav emigration."[30] Other attendees were the founder of the Romanian Iron Guard Horia Sima and a representative of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN).[31] At the same time, the Croatian émigré community fired back and spread leaflets around the city accusing Predrag Grahovac,

26 MRECIC, Box: AH/002, Date: 1947–1994, Collection: 118 Extradition of Nazis, Topic: Integrantes de la Ustacha. Pavelic, Eichmann. S Topográfica (topographic signature): C17-A59; Folder year 1957; Subject: Yugoslavia, Ante Pavelic 1 MRECIC Folder May 6, 1957, R.G. No. 160, R.E. No. 86, Secret. Case Ante Pavelich, to the MFA Alfonso G. De Laferrere by Ambassador Honorio Roigt, Belgrade.

27 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1957, F. 4, 49589.

28 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1957, F4, 416913.

29 Ivan Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005), 373.

30 Christian Axboe Nielsen, "The Yugoslav State Security Service and the Bleiburg Commemorations," *Politička misao* 55, no. 2 (2018): 50–70, 56.

31 "Službeno izvješće o preminuću Poglavnika Nezavisne Države Hrvatske dra Ante Pavelića," *Hrvatska* (*Croacia*), February 8, 1960.

Yugoslav diplomat in Buenos Aires, for World War II killings in Naorići near Sinj, Croatia. *Hrvatska misao* published a more detailed accusation in an interview with Božo Veić[32] thus questioning the legitimacy of Grahovac for giving interviews and statements regarding Ante Pavelić as a war criminal[33] and making the embassy invest time in answering these allegations.

The issue of Pavelić and other war criminals was not the only problem regarding Croatian "enemy emigration," which was a constant issue from their arrival in 1947 well into the late 1980s. As already noted from the 1972 report, the Croatian political community was constantly obstructing relations between the two countries. In the beginning, under Perón, the Croats had very good ties with the government, and it was not until Perón was ousted that the Yugoslav legation was granted the status of an embassy in 1956. However, in the state apparatus, especially in the ministry of foreign affairs, the old Peronist personnel remained, and they obstructed bilateral relations. According to the Yugoslav Embassy report, the Ustaša were "poisoning the good relations,"[34] while on paper the ministry officials asked the Yugoslav embassy to provide them with the list of public officials, publications and businessmen coming from the Croatian community.[35] After the end of the Liberating Revolution, when Frondizi came to power, Tito was invited to his inauguration, but that was refused because of the issue of Pavelić's extradition and because of the enemy emigration. The Argentinians concluded that "you are more bothered with Ante Pavelić than we are with Perón in exile."[36] The Yugoslav embassy kept pressuring the government about Pavelić, although he was already in Spain by that time, while the ministry of foreign affairs wanted to close that issue before Frondizi assumed office.[37]

Frondizi was ousted with yet another coup d'etat in March 1962, and in 1963 Communism was repressed,[38] and this implied a new blow for Yugoslavia which was considered behind the Iron Curtain with the rest of the Communist countries. It also meant shutting down some Yugoslav immigrant associations, while the Croatian ones were widely accepted due to their clear anti-Communist stance. In the 1960s we observe the appearance of

32 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1957 F 4, 410447, May 16, 1957, No. 76/1957.

33 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1957 F 4, 412933,

34 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1956, F 3, 41692, 41703.

35 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1956, F3, 41703.

36 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1958, F4, 46026.

37 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1958, F4, 410030, 413981.

38 MRECIC Res. Policía Federal No /63, Resolución Ministerio del Interior No. 586/63, Decreto Ley 5540/63 s/Represión Comunismo, Decreto 5541 ID, Res MRECIC 871.

a new generation in the ranks of the Croatian political émigré community worldwide whose moto was "to act instead of talk," but "apart from praying to God and learning traditional folk songs, they also had firearms training," which in the case of West Germany ended with shooting the doorman of the Yugoslav commercial office near Bonn.[39]

The Yugoslav embassy was constantly on the watch regarding the Croat émigré community, observing their undisturbed political activities and commemorations despite constant Yugoslav protests, always getting an answer that in Argentina the freedom of speech was guaranteed, at least for anti-Communists. The embassy regularly informed its headquarters in Belgrade about the activities of the Croatian "enemy emigration" regarding articles published in local Argentinian right-wing newspapers such as *La Prensa* and *La Nación* which were either "written by the Ustaša,"[40] or paid for by them or FAEDA,[41] or about the reaction of the Croatian youth to certain events occurring in Yugoslavia,[42] or in Argentina.[43] Furthermore, they tried to establish ties with more liberal media, such as *La Opinión*, and in 1972 met with its editor in chief Jacobo Timerman, assessing Croatian enemy emigration as by far the most active, employing all possible means.. Timerman also told them that they had close links with the CIA and SIDE (Argentinian intelligence).[44] The émigrés also destroyed postal envoys for the embassy (some Croats worked as translators there), targeting Yugoslav economic immigration from the earlier waves, and organized press conferences on the current situation in Yugoslavia, while local newspapers such as *La Prensa* reported on these events.[45]

The Yugoslav embassy also paid close attention to the publications of the Croatian community and regularly informed the ministry of foreign affairs about them. Primarily it followed the activities of the "Ustaša enemy emigration," even in 1980, "as the most numerous, most active, most organized and intellectually strongest,"[46] and about their political party activities and their networking either with other Croatian émigré communities worldwide, or with other anti-Communist alliances in Argentina, or their attempts at getting recognition or creating allies abroad who reacted at a minimal notice

39 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1964, F2, 429384.
40 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1964, F2, 449007.
41 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1965, 421361.
42 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1967, F5, 433067.
43 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1972, F4, 411405.
44 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1972, F4, 416509.
45 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, 1972 Annual Report, December 1972.
46 DA MSP RS PA, 1980, Argentina, F10, 416946.

by the Croats. For instance, the embassy reacted in 1961 after they learned that a Japanese diplomat in Buenos Aires visited the HOP at its headquarters, based on a request from a representative of the Free Europe organization to the Japanese government in Tokyo, requesting political and financial support.[47] Another example was when the Croatian journal *Napridak* from Buenos Aires published that Jordan recognized the Independent State of Croatia in 1963,[48] which turned out to be wrong. Another big worry was the return of Perón and the visit of Edo Bulat representing the Croatian Peronist group in Argentina to Isabel Martínez de Perón in case the Peronists come back to power. The purpose of the visit was to "maintain close links with Peronists because if they come back to power, we (the Croats) should use them to the best extent possible for our cause," Bulat allegedly said at the meeting.[49]

In 1973, Peronism became legal again and Perón returned to Argentina, which emboldened the Croatian political émigrés, especially the youth. Also, the Yugoslav embassy reported about an article in *La Prensa* stating that Perón's two personal guards were coming from "Yugofascist" ranks, a certain Miloš and Bojetić, while in fact it was Milo de Bogetich (a false name for Mile Ravlić, who later followed Isabel Martínez de Perón to the second exile and allegedly was even her lover). In the 1970s they were no longer tolerated in the West after the Black September Munich Olympics terrorist attack in 1972, the SAS airplane kidnapping in Stockholm by the Croatian National Resistance one week later, and the Australian ban on Croatian organizations,[50] so the radical portion of the Croatian political émigrés transferred to Latin America, another source of preoccupation for the embassy. Such is the so-called aviators' case from the 1970s, an illustrative example of the organization and global (terrorist) network of the Croatian diaspora. In 1971 in Stockholm, Miro Barešić and Anđelko Brajković, members of the Croatian National Resistance (see further in the text), killed Yugoslav ambassador to Sweden Vladimir Rolović. In 1972 other members of the Croatian National Resistance, Tomislav Rebrina, Nikola Lisac, and Rudolf Prskalo, hijacked an SAS flight at Stockholm airport to free the assassins. They all landed the plane in Franco's Spain where they were arrested, tried, and received mild punishments. The aid for their defense

47 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1961, 424219, Note on the talk of L. Latinović with Minister Counsellor of the Embassy of Japan, Goro Hatori, June 28, 1961.

48 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1963, F5, 426553.

49 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1972, 411508, March 10, 1972, Embassy SFRY BsAs, No. 17/1972.

50 Mate Nikola Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism During the Cold War* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020), 139.

was collected from the Croatian émigré community worldwide, and the organizer of their defense was Dinko Šakić who at that time had already moved to Spain. In 1973 they were released and eventually granted asylum in Paraguay, where Barešić was hired by Stroessner's dictatorship. Barešić was posted to the embassy of Paraguay to the US, where he was identified, and Sweden requested his extradition. He was eventually extradited to Sweden in 1980 where he served his sentence and then went back to Paraguay in 1987. As soon as Croatia proclaimed its independence, he returned to Croatia and fought in the Homeland War. He was killed in July 1991 under unclarified circumstances.

Another controversy was the so-called wrong person case:[51] on June 6, 1976, in Asunción, Jozo Damjanović of the Croatian National Resistance assassinated the Uruguayan ambassador to Paraguay Carlos Abdala, mistaking him for the Yugoslav ambassador to Paraguay, the real target of the assassination.[52] The aid for his defense was also collected from the Croat émigré community worldwide.[53] He was released from prison in 1992.[54]

All of this was used by the Yugoslav embassy to seize the momentum and point to all Croatian émigrés as terrorist groups and thus delegitimize their activities, but to small avail.

Furthermore, the embassy of the SFRY in Buenos Aires and its personnel were constantly targeted by attacks from the Croatian émigré community, including armed attacks against the embassy and its staff, attempts at breaking the Yugoslav statehood day celebrations (see chapter 5), protests in front of the embassy building, destruction of postal envoys for the embassy, etc. For example: in 1955, a bomb was put in the embassy but it did not explode;[55] shots were fired from an automatic gun at the embassy in 1959 after Pavelić's death;[56] the ambassador and embassy staff were attacked during their visit to Córdoba in 1964; in 1972, three Croats infiltrated the residence of the ambassador as construction workers who worked on the

51 Juan Carlos Raffo, *Error de persona* (Montevideo: Acali Editorial, 1977).

52 Juan Marcos González, *Mi general, mataron al embajador uruguayo. Historia de un atentado anticomunista* (Asunción: Intercontinental Editora, 2021).

53 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1976, F.5, 469469, Report of the Consular Department for 1976, No. 75/76, December 16, 1976, 13.

54 "Croat who killed Uruguayan Ambassador by Mistake 16 years ago, Freed," AP News, December 9, 1992.

55 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1956, F. 3 41692 meeting of Ambassador Petrović with the Chief of Protocol minister Bernini, July 28, 1955.

56 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1960, F. 3 4151, January 5, 1960, Report to the Secretariat of the Foreign Affairs.

chimney repair;[57] in October 1974, during the *Sutjeska* movie screening, Slovenian émigrés distributed leaflets against Yugoslavia in front of the movie theatre, and the film was cancelled after an inflammable device was put in the theatre, and daily threats were made to the embassy and its personnel;[58] in 1975, embassy received threats and calls and the Croat émigré community called for solidarity after an attack on the Yugoslav diplomat in Lyon, France.[59]

Curiously, the attacks ceased during the last civil-military dictatorship (1976–83) "because the dictatorship did not look well at terrorism",[60] But the activities of the Croats did not, especially the commemorative ones (see next chapter). After democracy arrived in 1983, they resumed the attacks against the embassy, covering embassy walls in posters saying, "Yugoslavia killed 300,000 Croats" in 1985,[61] or in 1987 sticking huge posters on private cars of embassy personnel with stickers, "Croatia must regain its independence" or "Croatia was included in Yugoslavia against its will."[62]

One of the last and most significant (and even violent) actions was an attack on Lazar Mojsov, president of the SFRY, on his visit to Argentina from October 25–27, 1987.[63] On that occasion, when he was laying a wreath before the monument to San Martín, he was attacked by two members of the Croatian diaspora community who were later arrested. However, some of the press stated that the entire emigrant community present (around one hundred people) and the ceremony itself was against Mojsov. There were banners reading: "Yugoslavia is a prison for Croatian people," "SFRY does not respect human rights," "Freedom for political prisoners," "Mojsov, get out of Argentina." Some press, such as *La Prensa* and *Clarín*, transmitted the communication of the "members of Croatian-Argentinian youth community" that criticized Yugoslavia for violation of human rights, prosecution, and

57 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1972, Folder 4, 429993 on the meeting between Milorad Bosanac, 1st Secretary of the Embassy with José B. Gago, Deputy Head of Department for Eastern European Countries, MFA, on June 30, 1972.

58 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1974, Folder 4, 325254

59 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1975, F4, 419641 –26/1975, note on the meeting of Ambassador Lalević with desk officer for SFRY Mission, April 7, 1965.

60 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1976, F5, 469469, Report of the Consular Department for 1976, No. 75/76, December 16, 1976, 12.

61 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1985, F10, 424676, 15 May 1985, 238/85, Embassy to SSIP

62 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1987, F10, 441936, Report to SSIP, 24 September 1987, No. 422/1987

63 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1987, F10, 449777, Report to SSIP, November 12, 1987, No. 548/1987 Writing of the Argentinian press regarding the visit of the PP SFRJ Lazar Mojsov to Argentina, October 25–27, 1987, 3.

massacres against Croats etc.[64] In response, Yugoslavia invested diplomatic and political, but also violent means to fight against the "enemy emigration." They were quite active in the West, as has been thoroughly analyzed by Christian Axboe Nielsen,[65] but there was also one UDBA killing in Argentina.

On July 16, 1960, Yugoslav secret services put a bomb in the Croatian Home where a youth organization dance was happening, killing a three-year-old girl, Dinka Domačinović, causing a syncope to the eighty-year-old neighbor, David Martínez,[66] and wounding sixteen dance participants, all youth. All the local media reported on the attack, also transmitting the statement of the Croatian Home Guard that "this is just one of many crimes of Serbian imperialism against the right of Croatian people to its life, freedom and independence,"[67] framing Yugoslavia as an exclusively Serbian and imperialist project. The journal *Hrvatska* dedicated its next issue to the attack, with the headline "Shameful Serb-Communist Attentat on Croatian Children," and a photo of Dinka Domačinović in an open coffin during her funeral, labeling her as "the new Croatian martyr," or "the new victim for the Homeland."[68] *Hrvatska* linked the attentat with a campaign against the Croatian community that started a month earlier, motivated by the extradition/kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann from Argentina to Israel (May 1960), stating that Croats were good friends with Eichmann. On the eve of the convention of Croatian Home Guard on July 14, *La Razón* daily transmitted a message by an anonymous "Association of patriotic institutions of the Yugoslav community," claiming that its purpose was to give support to Eichmann and protest his extradition and trial in Israel. This supposedly laid the ground for the attack on the Croatian Home two days later.

The Croatian Home Guard swiftly acted to deny the news published by *La Razón*, but also to distribute leaflets and posters in the center of Buenos Aires saying:

> Why… does *La Razón* lie and defame?
> LA RAZON lied in 1955, when it stated that 400 Croats died among the ranks of Alianza Libertadora—it was denied by the court sentence given by Judge Abel Reyna (November 1955).

64 "Alfonsín recibió a Mojsov y hoy se firman acuerdos," *La Prensa*, October 27, 1987.

65 Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations*.

66 "Trágica derivación del atentado al Hogar Croata," *Clarín*, July 18, 1960, 21.

67 "Falleció una de las víctimas del hecho terrorista cometido en el Club Croata," *La Prensa*, July 18, 1960, 24.

68 "Sramotni srbokomunistički attentat na hrvatsku djecu," *Hrvatska*, July 30, 1960, No. 14 (301).

> LA RAZON lied in 1955 when it affirmed that Croats participated in the burning of churches of Buenos Aires—it was rebuffed by the report of the Press Office of the National Investigative Commission (12 March 1956).
> LA RAZON lied in 1959, when it affirmed that Dr. Ante Pavelić, anti-Communist Croatian leader, worked es a torturer in the service of Stroessner in Paraguay.—It was rebuffed by Carlos Caballero Ferreira, Paraguayan revolutionary leader, and the death of Pavelić at the same time in Madrid.
> LA RAZON lies even today and defames honest and working Croatian community without any proof, spreading rubbish about the alleged relations between members of Croatian community and Ante Pavelić with Adolf Eichmann, currently tried in Israel.
> We solemnly declare that the Croatian community supports only the fight of the Croatian people for the freedom and its democratic and independent State.[69]

Krunoslav Draganović, who was blamed for smuggling Eichmann into Argentina, commented to Vinko Nikolić in 1965:

> In the first round of the news on the kidnapping of Eichmann nobody mentioned Croats. The first to report about it was the Madrid newspaper *Arriba* correspondent from Buenos Aires. He stated that members of a "Yugoslav association addicted to Tito's regime" denounced in the public that many Croats were accomplices of Eichmann who helped him flee from Europe. Their threat was soon made reality, a bomb was set by the UDBA agents. The invented "participation of Croats in the Eichmann scandal" had to serve as a "justified motive" and "moral cover" for a Yugo-Communist crime in the foreign world.[70]

Sinovčić also mentions that "the manhunt for Adolf Eichmann was used for anti-Croat propaganda," and that the attack followed after *La Razón* published the news that a meeting with Eichmann would be held at Hrvatski dom. He also stated that the head of the Croatian Home Guard, Ivan Asančaić, filed a lawsuit against *La Razón* for libel, and two years later, on July 24, 1962, the higher court confirmed the decision of the lower court and punished *La Razón* with a fine, the payment of all legal costs, and the obligation to publish the court decision, which *La Razón* did on June 9, 1963.[71]

69 Croatian Home Guard leaflet, personal archives of Josip Smolčić, Montevideo, Uruguay.
70 Vinko Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 2 vols. (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1967), 359.
71 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 35.

Another killing occurred in August 1971. Ivo Bogdan, a collaborator of *Studia Croatica* and author of the book *La tragedia de Bleiburg* was killed in his apartment. However, although he is on the revisionist historians' list of the UDBA killings,[72] allegedly because he revealed some critical data about Bleiburg in 1963, his death appears to have been the result of a common crime, which is confirmed by *La Prensa* stating that Juan Ghetaldi (his alias) was killed in an attempted robbery, and found with an electric cable tied around his neck.[73] Also, the September 1971 issue of *Hrvatska* announces the news of his death among other death announcements on page seven, stating that he was most probably "killed at an attempt of robbery."[74] If it had really been a UDBA crime, they would have given it much more publicity. Finally, when Ivo Rojnica proposed him for a posthumous decoration by the Republic of Croatia in 1994, he did not mention the fact that he had been assassinated, let alone claim that it had been by the UDBA.[75]

Two Croats, Three Parties

As soon as the first group of political émigrés arrived in Argentina in 1946, they started to form political parties and organizations. Such an intense activity was because they were a community of political exiles who believed that they would soon return to their homeland, and almost the entire NDH political and military leadership settled there.[76] Marko Sinovčić, editor in chief of the journal *Hrvatska misao*, listed a total of fifty-five Croatian associations and institutions (parties included) in Argentina operative during the Cold War.[77]

First, the Croatian Home Guard (Hrvatski domobran) was renewed and strengthened and most of the immigrants who arrived in the 1940s joined its ranks. It was a Croat political organization that advocated independence for Croatia from Yugoslavia and became associated with the Ustaša. It was founded in 1928 in Zagreb and, after being shut down and forced to flee with the

72 Bože Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskog iseljeništva* (Zagreb: Klub hrvatskih povratnika iz iseljeništva, 2001).

73 "Dos crímenes," *La Prensa*, August 19, 1971, 21.

74 *Hrvatska*, Buenos Aires, September 1971, No. 9 (453), 7.

75 Embassy of the Republic of Croatia to the Argentine Republic, Rojnica's proposal for posthumous decoration of the Republic of Croatia, August 23, 1994, Archives of the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman.

76 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, vol. 2.

77 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 63–64.

establishment of the royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia, it was reestablished as an émigré organization in 1931 in Buenos Aires. It was reactivated in 1947 with the arrival of the NDH leadership and very soon they launched the semi-monthly *Hrvatska* (Croatia) on November 1, 1947. A month earlier, the religious newsletter *Glas sv. Antuna* (Voice of St. Anthony) was also launched in newspaper form.[78]

When he arrived in Argentina, Pavelić took the lead of the Croatian political émigrés, and in November 1949 the Croatian State-Building Party (Hrvatska državotvorna stranka—HDS) was formed, as well as the Croatian government in exile in 1951, whose members included Džaferbeg Kulenović as president,[79] Vjekoslav Vrančić as vice president, Petar Pejačević as minister of foreign affairs,[80] and Jozo Dumandžić as minister of transport. Its aim was "the Croatian state and a complete freedom of Croatian people," which "has the right to a full sovereignty and state independence on the totality of Croatian ethnic and historical territory."[81] The Yugoslav legation stated these facts when requesting Pavelić's extradition in 1951. Historians from the Croatian diaspora claim that Ante Pavelić was "aware of the mortgage of history and the disappearance of the Ustaša movement with the defeat of the NDH," and that the HDS soon ceased its activities since "it was more of a local than a global reach, and because of the intense activities of Yugoslav agents and their disinformation campaigns."[82] However, it was quite the opposite, and they could move freely, especially in the first period when the HDS was operating, when they immediately got involved into existing organizations and started forming new ones.

After the failure of the HDS, on June 8, 1956, Pavelić and his closest collaborators founded the HOP in Buenos Aires as "a Croatian political umbrella organization with the aim to represent Croatian national interests in the world and in the homeland."[83] Its founding statement was signed by Ante Pavelić, Džaferbeg Kulenović, Ivica Frković, Vjekoslav Vrančić, Stjepan Hefer, Josip Marković, Andrija Ilić, Stipe Matijević, Petar Pejačević, Oskar Turina, Ivan Kordić, and Ivan Asančajić, all former high NDH officials (mostly ministers), and the latter head of the Croatian Home Guard.[84] It

78 Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini*, 54–55.

79 Kulenović was vice president of the NDH from September 7, 1941, until the end of the war when he fled to Syria. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 217.

80 Pejačević was the NDH ambassador to Spain (1941–45). Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 315.

81 DA MSP RS PA 1951, Argentina, F 3, 45959/2, Annex, 4.

82 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 369.

83 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 369.

84 "Povodom druge obljetnice potpisa Temeljne izjave Hrvatskog oslobodilačkog pokreta," *Hrvatska*, July 10, 1958, No. 13 (252), 1.

was conceptualized as "an all-Croat, supra-party and a democratic movement with the aim to concentrate, coordinate and intensify the work of the members of the Croatian Ustaša movement, Croatian Republican Peasant Party (Stjepan Radić),[85] Croatian State-Building Party and Croatian Armed Forces," while its aim was "to achieve the complete freedom of the whole Croatian nation and a reestablishment of the Independent State of Croatia on its whole historical and ethnic territory between rivers Mura, Drava, Danube, Drina and the Adriatic Sea," meaning that it included Bosnia and Herzegovina.[86] While it expressed its will to collaborate with all liberation movements and organizations of all the oppressed peoples that were open to such collaboration and wanted to help the Croatian liberation struggle,[87] according to Kožul they aimed at a continuation of NDH state sovereignty which gave them legitimacy and thus distinguished them from other parties.[88] The NDH sovereignty claim is very common among the HOP and other political émigrés, but the fact is that the NDH was a puppet state and that it was split into a German and Italian protectorate.

Within this acceptance of everyone who was open to such collaboration, I should mention the rapprochement and an attempt at agreement between Ante Pavelić and Milan Stojadinović, former Serbian prime minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1935–39), a royalist, philo-fascist, and anti-Communist, who also found refuge in Buenos Aires. During 1954, they held talks about a future peaceful coexistence between separate and independent Croatian and Serbian states.[89] As a preparation of the émigré public opinion in mid-1954, Croatian émigré journal *Izbor* first interviewed Pavelić and then Stojadinović,[90] who stated that he was in favor of a peaceful separation between Croats and Serbs and the establishment of separate independent

85 The Croatian Republican Peasant Party Stjepan Radić, (Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka Stjepan Radić,—HRSS), was a faction that, after the invasion of the Axis powers in Yugoslavia in 1941, split from the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka—HSS) and aligned with the Ustaša movement and the NDH. The HSS was banned by the NDH, and some its members joined the resistance together with the Communist Party of Croatia.

86 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 370

87 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 370.

88 Ante Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa hrvatskih političkih stranaka i organizacija nakon Drugog svjetskog rata," in *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020), 74.

89 Vjekoslav Vrančić, "Sporazum Pavelić—Stojadinović," *Hrvatska Revija*, Munich—Barcelona, September 1989, No. 3, 566.

90 Josip Subašić, "Kako riješiti srpsko-hrvatski spor. Razgovor s Dr. Milanom Stojadinovićem, bivšim predsjednikom Vlade i Predsjednikom Srpske Radikalne Stranke," *Izbor*, Year II, No. 10, July 1954.

states.[91] Pavelić also immediately commented on Stojadinović's statement in *Hrvatska*, praising his position and deeming it as a sign of maturity and the readiness of Serbian people, "to eliminate Yugoslavia, and divide it into the parts of which it has been artificially made."[92] Both the Croatian and Serbian émigré press reported on the two statements, as did the *Freie Presse* and *Il Tempo* from Rome, Italy, which published a piece on the "Reconciliation between Milan Stojadinović and Ante Pavelić."[93]

There was lot of speculation at the time of the agreement, and even after. In 1961, *Hrvatska misao* interviewed Josip Subašić, who was a liaison between Pavelić and Stojadinović, to clarify what happened. According to Subašić, they were working on an agreement, but it had never been signed. It was supposed to be signed in Stojadinović's apartment in Buenos Aires, and Milan Stojadinović at first wanted to organize a ceremony, while Pavelić was against any public events, in favor of only publishing the text of the agreement in the two émigré journals, *Hrvatska* and *Srpska zastava* (Serbian flag, the journal of the Serbs in South America). Pavelić went to Stojadinović's home accompanied by Subašić, but Stojadinović asked to postpone the signing and, after a long private talk between the two, they did not sign the agreement that evening. According to Katalinić, Stojadinović was blackmailed by the Yugoslav intelligence service that was holding his brother Dragomir; after they learned that he did not sign the agreement, they released him.[94] According to Subašić, Perón was soon after ousted by the Liberating Revolution, so all talks were canceled. According to *Hrvatska misao*, both Stojadinović and Subašić held copies of the agreement draft, but it has never been published.[95]

Reverend Gjuro Baloković, witness of the events, and who talked to Stojadinović and Pavelić in 1954 about the topic, told Vinko Nikolić that the agreement stated that the Serbian Radical Party recognized the rights of Croats to their independent state, and that the borders would be determined by the Serbian national assembly and the Croatian state parliament. Supposedly there was an interim agreement on the borders where they would split Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Stojadinović aspired at getting Dubrovnik under Serbia.[96] The talks and the agreement itself found a lot

91 Subašić, "Kako riješiti srpsko-hrvatski spor," 8.

92 "Za dobro susjedstvo," *Hrvatska*, August 18, 1954, no. 16, 1.

93 Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 266.

94 Kazimir Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede: Povijest hrvatske političke emigracije 1945–1990*, 3 vols. (Zagreb: Naklada Trpimir, 2017), 231.

95 *Hrvatska misao*, No. 26, Buenos Aires, 1961, 61–62.

96 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine,* 218.

of opposition among different political fractions. The Croatian Peasant Party members thought that "Pavelić sold Bosnia now as he sold Dalmatia before," and many high NDH officials were strongly against it, while the Croatian Home Defenders thought that it was a big success for Pavelić.[97] Baloković then met with Pavelić who did not deny that the agreement was made, and he confirmed what Stojadinović said, only that they disagreed about Dubrovnik. Pavelić allegedly stated that the people of Dubrovnik were "cultural and democratic, they will know what to decide and where to go."[98] Vinko Nikolić, who interviewed Baloković, commented that the main actors in the agreement, Pavelić and Stojadinović, never said a word later, so it is all hearsay, but that the conclusion was "that there is no such document and there were only talks between two worn out politicians to whom it occurred too late to create a basis for a real agreement between Croats and Serbs … Fatally too late."[99] In 1970, the Croatian National Resistance journal *Obrana* published an alleged copy of the first draft of the agreement, but its authenticity was not verified.[100] In 1957, the Yugoslav embassy reported that, at a reception at the Syrian embassy, Milan Stojadinović sent a journalist to ask if he could greet the Yugoslav ambassador, which was refused. The ambassador concluded: "I believe he wanted to express his satisfaction that Yugoslavia is requesting Pavelić's extradition again and to justify before us his earlier contacts with Pavelić and the agreement that they made in 1955,"[101] meaning that they believed that the agreement was made.

The HOP had headquarters in Buenos Aires, with branches in the Americas, Australia, and Europe. It enjoyed widespread support of the Croatian diaspora, and it contested the HSS that was fiercely anti-Ustaša since the 1930s, and was in conflict until the 1990s. The Croatian Peasant Party was not numerous in Argentina, and their members were mostly from earlier waves of emigration. The HOP was a member of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations, and the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) founded in 1966, and also participated in FAEDA and other local anti-Communist alliances in Argentina.

At his deathbed, Pavelić allegedly said his last wish to his confessor, priest Branko Marić, in the presence of Pavelić's wife to "authorize as his successor Stjepan Hefer in all the issues and activities of the Croatian state

97 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 219.

98 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 220.

99 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 221.

100 Berislav Gjuro Deželić, "Osvrt na sporazumijevanje Pavelić- Stojadinović," *Obrana*, br. 129–130, May 1970, 1–2.

101 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1957, F 4, 410429, May 4, 1957, No. 64/1957.

government, Croatian Liberation Movement and the council," and he appointed as his vice presidents Ivan Asančaić and Josip Marković.[102] This caused a great discontent among the old guard of the convinced Ustaša members, since Hefer was an NDH era minister for the rural economy and food, but also a member of the Croatian Peasant Party. The HOP managed to preserve unity for some time, but with a lot of internal disputes. There were also some—especially members of the second generation, in combination with the newly arrived *pečalbari* or *pasošari* (guest workers), especially in Western Europe and Australia—who thought that there should be more radical and revolutionary activity towards Yugoslavia.[103] The situation in Argentina was different, because there was no later immigration, meaning that the youth organizations and activities were carried out exclusively by the second generation of the post-World War II political émigré community.

This is how several radical groups arose from the HOP, such as the Croatian Crusaders' Brotherhood (Hrvatsko križarsko bratstvo—HKB) in West Germany, the Secret Revolutionary Ustaša Troops (Tajne revolucionarne ustaške postrojbe—TRUP), the Croatian National Front (Hrvatska narodna fronta—HNF), or the Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood (Hrvatsko revolucionarno bratstvo—HRB) operating in Australia. Tokić wrote an exhaustive volume on the violent portion of the political émigré community, analyzing mostly their activities in West Germany and Australia.[104] Just to name a few, the TRUP was responsible for putting a bomb in a Belgrade cinema in 1967; the HRB, mostly from Australia, in 1972 infiltrated nineteen members of its group into Bugojno in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a first such action after the Kavran group in 1947–48; and the HNF tried to infiltrate into Yugoslavia in 1974. The HKB carried out an attack on the Yugoslav trade mission and embassy in Bonn in 1961 and 1962. They were excluded from the HOP, but those who were in favor or against such actions caused a definite split in the party.[105] Hefer was more pacifist, and against revolutionary and terrorist action, while the other group, led by Vjekoslav Vrančić, founded a new "reorganization" branch, the HOP–Reorganizacija (HOP–Reorganization—HOP–R), on January 6, 1966 and launched their journal *Hrvatski narod* (Croatian Nation). This split between *heferovci* and *vrančićevci* was not only at the party level, but also in the Croatian émigré community in

102 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 373.

103 Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine,* 113. "Pečalba" comes from guest work and "pasošari" comes from passport holders, derogatory terms for low-paid seasonal guest workers from Yugoslavia.

104 Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism*.

105 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/484.

Argentina. Families were divided and polarized and even stopped talking to each other.[106]

According to the 1972 Yugoslav embassy annual report, the HOP–R was the strongest and most numerous émigré party in Argentina, with between 1,500 and 2,000 members. They had branches in the US, Canada, Germany, Sweden, and Australia. They also counted with all the branches of Hrvatski domobran, Hrvatski dom d.d., *Hrvatski narod*, Jadran, and other smaller groups.[107] On the other hand, the HOP led by Hefer counted around 1,000 members, the journal *Hrvatska*, the Federation of United Croatian Youth (SHUMS), and the Croatian Catholic community. It had branches in the US, Canada, Australia, Sweden, and France, more legitimacy due to being appointed by Pavelić as his successor, and more supporters abroad. Their concept was to rely on the West and wait for World War III to destroy the SFRY. After Hefer's death, it started to advocate for the destruction of world Communism.[108] Hefer was succeeded by Antun Bonifačić, and later by Srećko Pšeničnik, Pavelić's son in law, who moved to Toronto.

Another party founded in Buenos Aires in 1951 was the Croatian Republican Party (Hrvatska republikanska stranka—HRS), "in favor of modernization and updating of the Ustaša principles, not a novelty in Croatian political life,"[109] founded by brothers Ivo and Ante Oršanić.[110] The party very soon launched the journal *Republika Hrvatska.* The HRS did not distance itself from the Ustaša movement, stating that it reflected the general will of the Croatian people to fight for a sovereign state. However, they were in favor of more unity and believed that a fight for a state and for freedom within that state should be prioritized, "and that it is impossible to achieve unity, because of different living realities in the emigration."[111] It was never as numerous as the HOP or the HSS, but they had branches in Croatian diaspora centers worldwide. They had sixty members in Argentina in 1972, but were very active and well-connected abroad, as deemed by the Yugoslav embassy.[112] After Oršanić died in 1967, he was succeeded by Ivo Korsky.

106 M.S. (born in 1942), the 1.5 generation, interviewed on November 27, 2017.

107 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/486.

108 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/488-9.

109 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 378.

110 Ivo Oršanić was the NDH chief of propaganda, and later chief of Ustaša youth.

111 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 378.

112 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/490.

There were also political parties founded in other strongholds of the Croatian diaspora, but with branches in the country. The first worth mentioning is the Croatian National Resistance (Hrvatski narodni otpor—Otpor), formed already in 1944 based on guerrilla fighting and reactivated in 1955 in Valencia, Spain, by Vjekoslav Maks Luburić. It published two journals, *Obrana* and *Drina*. Marin Sopta, an HNO member himself, later turned historian, claims that the Rover case made Luburić reactivate the HNO, although it was in fact the other way around. The foundation of the HNO preceded the Rover case and maybe even caused it, as seen in chapter 1. Luburić distanced himself from Pavelić, the HOP, and the Ustaša (although never denying that he was a member of the movement), but stated that they were outdated and that they would not help unite the people to fight for independence and freedom.[113] "Luburić was aware that their times were gone and that new generations should come. That was not well received in the HOP and Buenos Aires who thought that they are the bosses who give orders."[114] Luburić advocated for a reconciliation among Croatian émigrés and communists,[115] which also gained him support in Croatian strongholds worldwide, whether first or second (younger) generation. Luburić stated: "Our position is clear: destroy every Yugoslavia, with the help of Russians, Americans, communists, neo-communists, with anyone who wants to destroy it. To destroy it with dialectics of words or with dynamite, but to destroy it unconditionally, because if there is any state that does not have the right to exist—it is Yugoslavia."[116] After Luburić was killed by an UDBA agent, Ilija Stanić, Otpor continued his path. As stated in *Obrana* on July 15, 1971: "Our stance is based on political realism, Croatian Communists exist and they are the only political force that dominates in the homeland," thus acknowledging that Communism was not exclusively Yugoslav or Serb, and not only that the Ustaša were not a synonym for Croats, but that Croatian Communists were key political actors at home.

Otpor, especially its radical terrorist branch, the HRB, attracted a lot of *pečalbari*, guest workers who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of them were involved in political violence, the most important being the killing of Ambassador Rolović in Sweden in 1972 and the hijacking of the SAS plane in 1972, but also the hijacking of an airplane in the US in 1976. As in all the

113 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 391.

114 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 396.

115 Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, "Poruka izmirenja H.N.Odpora s hrvatskim komunistima" [Message of reconciliation of Croatian National Resistance with Croatian communists], *Drina* (1964): 18–21.

116 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 394.

other parties, there was a crisis after the death of its founder, and a clash of generations.[117] In 1972, Mirko Bušić from Argentina was elected as the Otpor president, and replaced by Stjepan Bilandžić in 1974, who decided to move the activities and journals to West Germany. However, it was banned in 1976 due to good relations with Yugoslavia, as claimed by Marin Sopta, but also due to the absolute intolerance towards terrorist groups in the West after the Munich Olympics, and the Australian ban on Croatian organizations. So Otpor moved back to Valencia. There were mass arrests and imprisonments of Otpor members in early the 1980s in Australia and the US, and "millions of USD were spent on their defense."[118] Since the émigré activities moved from Argentina, mainly to Canada, they were very active in the second half of the 1980s in that country, organizing conferences at the University of York, such as the case of the lecture by Ivan Supek, Zagreb University rector, on "Europe without borders."[119] Also, Sopta was elected head of the HNO in 1986, and in 1987 they organized a lecture by Dr. Franjo Tuđman at York University (see later in the text). As Sopta proudly states, Otpor "was the only party that ceased activities as soon as the Croatian state was established."[120]

According to the 1972 Yugoslav embassy report, Otpor was an extreme terrorist organization which lost a lot with Luburić's death, and it was even more weakened when his brother-in-law and immediate successor Dinko Šakić left for Spain. It collaborated with the HOP–R, but it never had many supporters due to Luburić's unpopularity. In Argentina, its activities were reduced to the distribution of *Drina* and *Obrana* journals. They stressed that they should work with the USSR, if the USSR would guarantee a creation of the NDH, and they had their own club on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, in San Justo.[121]

Another important political party was the Croatian National Committee (Hrvatski narodni odbor—Odbor), founded by Branimir Jelić,[122] also the founder of the Croatian Home Guard in the 1930s. Odbor was founded in

117 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 398.

118 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 402.

119 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 403-4.

120 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 404.

121 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/490-1.

122 Branimir Jelić, Croatian émigré in Germany, was a prominent member of the Ustaša organization since the 1930s, in charge of recruitment and support abroad. During World War II, he was kept prisoner by the British Army on the Isle of Man until 1945, so he did not participate in the NDH. In 1949, he moved to West Germany where he was politically active until 1972, and founded the Croatian National Committee.

1951 in Germany, also with the aim of founding a free Croatian state in the community of other sovereign states of Europe. It was one of the most influential parties, especially in West Germany. As with Luburić, Jelić was in favor of collaboration and reconciliation with Croatian Communists, stating that "it is time to reconcile under the condition that they join the Croatian struggle for freedom," stressing that the émigrés "will forgive them everything, provided that they do not have Croatian blood on their hands and if they join Croatian people in its struggle for freedom."[123] He also believed that the internal friction among émigré political groups and "carrying out narrow émigré politics" had to stop, and that they should all establish firm ties with a revolutionary movement at home.[124] Jelić died of poisoning in 1972, and later he was replaced by his brother, and Odbor later joined the Croatian National Council (Hrvatsko narodno vijeće—HNV). Odbor did not have its branch organization in Argentina, but they had a representative: "After Jelić stated that they should cooperate with USSR, his popularity grew and created an illusion that with the help of USSR they will destroy Yugoslavia and create NDH. However, most of the political émigré community considered him a Russian agent and did not accept his 'leaning on' USSR," states the 1972 Yugoslav embassy report.[125]

The HSS was the oldest and the most influential Croatian political party that was strongly opposing the Ustaša movement, at home and in emigration.[126] Together with the HOP, and later the HNV, the HSS was the most massive and for a long time the most influential party in the community, although its influence was shaken after World War II, and also because they did not get along well with the Ustaša, neither during or after the war. Their stronghold was more in the US and London, with the *Nova Hrvatska* journal and Juraj Krnjević as its head since 1964, after the death of Vladko Maček. In Argentina they were not at all numerous, with a limited number of supporters, mostly old emigrants who arrived after World War I, and a fewer number of new ones.[127] There was some presence of the HSS in South America, with branches in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

123 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 388.

124 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 389.

125 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/491.

126 Marin Sopta, "Hrvatska seljačka stranka i Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret od 1945. do 1990," in *Povijest hrvatske političke emigracije u 20. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Centar za istraživanje hrvatskog iseljeništva, 2020), 102–103.

127 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/494.

The headquarters of the HSS Central Committee for South America was in Buenos Aires from 1948 to 1956, in Montevideo from 1957 to 1963, and then back in Buenos Aires under the leadership of Nikola Lončar until 1987.[128]

There were several attempts at achieving unity and overcoming internal differences. In 1967 in Buenos Aires the parties issued the "Declaration of April 10," where they decided to overcome differences and close ranks among the exiled Croatia "to help Croatian people in the Homeland in the fight against Serbian and Communist tyranny and to establish a Croatian state."[129] In general, from the late 1960s, Croats in exile started looking towards the homeland and following the events in Croatia. On March 6, 1970, they created the Council of Croats of South America for the Establishment of the Croatian State (Vijeće Hrvata Južne Amerike za uspostavu hrvatske države), which included the HRS, the HOP-R, Otpor, and the Croatian Home Guard, with Vjekoslav Vrančić at the head "to help the Croatian people achieve its freedom and state independence."[130] This Council was a precursor to the HNV founded in 1974 in Toronto, as the first umbrella organization which took the prominence away from Argentina. It organizes congresses every two years. In 1990, during their eighth congress in Munich, August 25–27, the HNV president, Radovan Latković, was invited to Croatia by President Franjo Tuđman. The next day, on August 28, 1990, in Hotel Dubrovnik in Zagreb, the HNV adopted a declaration giving support to the democratically elected government and the presidency of Franjo Tuđman.[131] The Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires also identified other political organizations in Argentina, such as the Croatian-Argentinian Cultural Club (Hrvatsko-argentinski kulturni klub—HAKK), founded in 1960 with around 150 members, gathering intellectuals and wealthy Croats, including some Argentinians such as the *La Prensa* journalist Alejandro Daussut. The HAKK was also linked to the Croatian-Latin American Institute (Hrvatski-latinskoamerički institut), headed by Ivo Rojnica, which published *Studia Croatica* quarterly in Spanish.[132]

Finally, I will offer an overview of the commonalities and differences among different political groups. Their divisions and differences were

128 Ivan Tepeš, *Hrvatska politička emigracija—HSS* (Zagreb: AGM, 2021), 358–67.

129 *Hrvatski narod*, May 19, 1967, No. 19.

130 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 381.

131 Tanja Trošelj Miočević, "Hrvatska politička emigracija nakon Drugog svjetskog rata," in *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020), 21–47.

132 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/493.

ideological and generational, but also personal. All the parties' programs were unified around the goal of achieving Croatian independence, "a free and sovereign Croatian state,"[133] except initially for the Croatian Peasant Party that eventually aligned with that goal after Vladko Maček died in 1964. There was a constant expression of a need of unity, or at gathering around the flag, but it was not until 1974 with the HNV that they closed ranks or had a unified strategy, maybe because by that time the original founders died. Otpor was the most radical political party, questioning the legitimacy of the historical leaders or the supposed state continuity, both through Maček and Pavelić.[134]

They all considered external help in the destruction of Yugoslavia, mostly from the US and the West—expecting a World War III that never came—or even help from the USSR after its split with Yugoslavia in 1948, or as Clissold calls it, "flirtation with Moscow."[135] However, in 1986, the HNV concluded that "it was a mistake to rely on the US or to look at the Croatian problematics exclusively through the lens of Western politics,"[136] and that it was necessary to be neutral. They also formed alliances with other oppressed nations, and "all Croatian émigré parties and organizations worldwide regularly participated in the week of the oppressed nations with the aim to express and inform about the yearning of Croatian people for its own state."[137]

An important source of conflict was the means of struggle, the discussion between peaceful or violent means. The HOP, which had revolutionary origins, was vague about it, and it was not until the 1960s that political violence was applied from its ranks when the younger generation stepped in, such as the HRB that were in favor of using "every possible means at their disposal, even weapons, to achieve the final goal."[138] Otpor was also in favor of the application of all possible means, and indeed they acted upon it. The HNV was against the use of force, as was the HRS and Odbor.

Another issue was cooperation with the homeland. Odbor and Otpor were in favor of collaborating with Communists. Even after Luburić's assassination by the Yugoslav secret service in 1969, Otpor in its revised program stated that it would work in the direction of "all-Croat reconciliation."[139] The

133 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 73.
134 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 75.
135 Stephen Clissold, "Croat Separatism: Nationalism, Dissidence, and Terrorism," *Conflict Studies* 103 (1979): 3–21, 7.
136 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 76.
137 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 77.
138 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 77.
139 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 79.

HNV decided to be the bridge between "emigrated and homeland Croatia" and turned the discourse around, stating that the Croatian people in the homeland could count on the support of the émigrés,[140] concluding at the 1980 congress that the "emigrated Croatia cannot destroy the political regime in Yugoslavia by itself," and could not replace the people at home nor take their role, but it could help spread the awareness on the futility of a disunited and weak Yugoslavia.[141] In terms of territory, according to Kožul, all groups intended to "cover its ethnic and historical territory," meaning Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina—some went even further, but Bosnia and Herzegovina were unquestionable for all.[142]In terms of political organization, they all wanted a constitutional republic, with a parliament, and a government. The HRS even thought that there should be a transitional tripartite government led by "three distinguished persons from Croatian national life, non-party affiliated", while HDP was in favor of "a national salvation government."[143]

The Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires was constantly on the watch, following the actions of the Croatian or Ustaša enemy emigration. Their analyses are a useful for realizing how well-informed they were about what was going on within the community, but also for observing an interplay between Yugoslav foreign policy interests in the country, local politics, and the internal and external dynamics of émigré political organizations. In a 1963 report, they called for special attention to the fundamental problem of political émigrés, because they acted without impediment in different areas. They said that "All the efforts should be invested to paralyze the activities of HOP, the most organized and the most dangerous organization … by all means our success in this field depends to a great extent on the climate in the relations of our country with Argentina."[144] The embassy was also worried about the mutual visits and connections between different centers of the Croatian diaspora worldwide. For instance, in 1964 Odbor leader Jelić visited Argentina, and FAEDA organized the Argentinian Movement for the Fight Against Communism in the most luxurious hotel in Buenos Aires. The news was transmitted by *Freie Presse*, journal of German refugees from Eastern European countries.[145]

In 1964, the embassy also reported on the intensification of internal disputes among Croatian groups. Luburić's group ferociously opposed the

140 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 79.
141 Kožul "Analiza političkih programa," 79–80.
142 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 80.
143 Kožul, "Analiza političkih programa," 80–81.
144 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1963, F 5, 426553.
145 DA MSP RS PA Argentina, 1964, F2, 980, their number 221/64 4.

HOP, which was the reason why the *luburićevci* decided to celebrate April 10 separately that year. In their analysis, like the analysis of diaspora historians, the HOP's aim was to show that they were the only "pure" organization and the only representatives of the Croatian émigrés, which led to direct conflict with all émigré groups, especially Otpor and the HAKK. There were attempts at creating umbrella organizations (*Međudruštveni odbor*), but they failed "due to the HOP monopole and our [Yugoslav] activities, so it is hard to think that they will recover in the future."[146] They also detected that "the efforts by HOP to maintain purity is getting more and more dramatic. We expect a bigger gap among different groups and lead to fragmentation. We should look at it through the current situation in the country. The more liberal the regime, the faster the process, and vice versa."[147]

Also in the 1970s, with the change of treatment of radical, violent groups of the Croatian émigré community in the West, all the Yugoslav embassies intervened before the governments of European and overseas countries (Australia, Austria, US, Canada). They indicated different forms and sources of activities of Croatian enemy emigration. The Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires also used these elements to frame the Croatian émigré community as terrorist, not without foundation, given the constant attacks against the embassy and its personnel. However, they were aware of the current situation in Argentina (under the military dictatorship led by General Lanusse) and "the specific position of emigration in Argentina which has integrated into the official structures of the country," therefore planning a small intervention before the ministry of foreign affairs in order not to weaken the relations with authorities, but to lead them gradually to a constructive collaboration.[148] In November 1972, Yugoslav ambassador Bernardić met with the minister of foreign affairs Eduardo McLoughlin to bring his attention to these events and to also stress that the issue of extremist immigrant activities was constantly present in Yugoslav-Argentinian relations, where one very aggressive minority, constantly acted and planned terrorist attacks against the SFRY, listing the HOP, Otpor, the HRS, the HAKK, and the Slovene separatist group.[149]

Things got worse for the Yugoslav embassy with the return of Perón (May 25, 1973) at the local level, but also at the international level. The

146 DA MSP RS PA Argentina, 1964, F2, Telegram No. 119, 10.4.1964.

147 DA MSP RS PA Argentina, 1964, F2, 41772.

148 DA MSP RS PA Argentina, 1972, F4, 428978

149 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1972 F4, 441413, November 21, 1972. Note about the meeting between Ambassador D. Bernardić with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduardo McLoughlin, October 23, 1972.

embassy stated that there was a "serious threat that Argentina was now a stronghold of Ustaša activities, as Australia had been until recently. The Croats are motivated by the return of Peronists to power, and they are doing everything to reconnect with the old links that existed in times of Perón, also counting with the wide solidarity support of European fascists of all colors that Perón admitted after World War II, up to a million people."[150] And it was reflected in the rise of attacks and provocations against the Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires. "The blow to the Ustaša organizations in Australia will have as a consequence the leaving of the most active and most dangerous groups to other countries, and in the view of the new constellations, we should expect them in Argentina too, because here they are far more powerful in terms of organization and material means," the embassy reported.[151] And indeed, after being released from prison in Spain, the Rolović assassins and the group that kidnapped the SAS plane to rescue them fled to Paraguay in 1974, and entered Argentinian territory in October 1975. The Argentinian federal police asked for collaboration with foreign embassies intelligence, while the Yugoslav embassy was already informed about it.[152] With the death of Perón, the overthrowing of the Peronist government led by his widow Isabel Martínez de Perón, and the arrival of the civil-military dictatorship in 1976 which lasted until 1983, things changed in a curious direction. Croatian émigrés started losing positions and privileges due to their Peronist orientation.[153] The main change was that the attacks against the embassy and its personnel ceased because terrorist and subversive activities were impossible to carry out under the dictatorship.

However, they continued with meetings and other activities. On April 10, 1976, HNV president Stanko Vujica visited Argentina. By that time the HOP almost completely lost its relevance, and the HAKK was more relevant, according to the embassy, with Ivo Rojnica "as the grey eminence whose wealth makes it possible to actively engage against SFRY not only within the enemy emigration but also local environment. Croat and Argentinian intellectuals, especially journalists, are on his payroll. At the moment, the Republicans and HAKK are intellectually the strongest with the most elaborated platform of action."[154] In 1978, with the dictatorship already two

150 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1973, F5, 415260

151 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1973, F5, 415200.

152 DA MSPR RS PA Argentina, 1975, F4, 451498, no 354/1975, October 28, 1975.

153 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1976, F5, 469469. No. 75/76, Report of the Consular Department, December 16, 1976.

154 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1976, F 5, 469469. No. 75/76, Report of the Consular Department, December 16, 1976.

and a half years in power, the situation in the Croatian émigré community was the following, according to the embassy:

> no renewal of ranks, no newcomers, they became static and internal. After World War II the NDH elite arrived in Argentina, but the center of émigré activities has been long ago transferred to West Europe, US, and Australia. Many died, got old, and the majority got disappointed with the sterility of political leadership and no longer interested in émigré politics. They are no longer capable of carrying out any terrorist action, and even the celebration of November 29 passed without the smallest provocation. The dictatorship is depressing them because they do not let them organize any public manifestations against SFRY or spread propaganda. On another hand HOP-R was still the most massive in Argentina, but with no visible activities, and with financial problems, because their leadership (Vrančić) is getting old, while the other HOP is not even showing signs of life.[155]

Therefore, they deemed that at that moment the intellectually strongest and most dangerous organization in Argentina was the HAKK, "although not numerous, but exceptionally active."[156] In 1980, they still felt the presence of "Ustaša enemy emigration" in "all the pores of the society, economy, police, military, state apparatus, censorship and post office," but they observed the weakness of the second generation born and assimilated into Argentina that decreasingly joined émigré activities.[157]Another element to be considered was the fact that Argentina joined the Non-Aligned Movement, which led to a positive development of bilateral relations with Yugoslavia. The peak of 1980 was the HNV congress organized in Buenos Aires that year.

After the end of the dictatorship in 1983 and the arrival of democracy with President Raúl Alfonsín, the social and political panorama changed for both Yugoslav and Croatian sides. With the rise of the human rights movements in Argentina seeking for their disappeared and the trials against the junta members, the émigré community organized a series of press conferences and protests pointing to Yugoslavia violating human rights and not being a democratic country. They also discussed the increasingly negative economic and political situation and fragmentation in the country. In that sense, in 1984, the HNV president Mate Meštrović arrived in Argentina

155 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1979, F 10, 46439.
156 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1979, F 10, 46439.
157 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1980, F 10, 416947.

and held a press conference.[158] In 1985, the Yugoslav ministry of foreign affairs sent instructions to the embassy in Buenos Aires to give priority to the issue that "the enemy emigration is raising its head again and finding maneuvering space in the framework of the so-called legalist concept of a renewed democratic system."[159] In October 1987 the SFRY president Lazar Mojsov visited Argentina,[160] with the last significant organized violent act by the second generation of the émigré community.

Youth Organizations

According to the Yugoslav embassy, each political organization also had a youth group working under different names. They were usually made up of children of Ustaša émigrés in exile, "as well as a smaller number of exiles in the postwar years, including some who arrived with Yugoslav passport."[161] The killing of Dinka Domačinović in July 1960 during a ball organized by the Croatian Home Guard Youth (Hrvatska domobranska mladež – HDM) triggered an increase in youth group activities. After the killing of the Domačinović baby, they distributed leaflets in Spanish with the photo of the Domačinović family where little Dinka is at the center saying: "Assassins! This little girl, only three years old, that we can see here in her brother's arms, is the innocent victim of the barbarism of Yugoslav communism, killed in Croatian Home on 16 July 1960." In the following paragraph and in bold capital letters it said: "Argentinian brothers: we, Croatian youth, are warning you about the red danger. Let us put an end to treacherous bombs that take away innocent lives. Let us unite and fight together against communism. Croatian youth."[162] Dinka Domačinović became a symbol of victimhood and innocence of the Croatian youth, and the HDM branch in Uruguay carried her name.[163]

According to Adriana Tevšić Milat, the HDM organized talks and conferences in Croatian where they learned about history, traditions, and the

158 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1984, F 10, 437231.

159 DA MSP RS PA, 1985, Argentina, F10, 426435, May 20, 1985, Chief of the Directorate General for Latin America and the Caribbean Radomir Zečević to the SFRY Embassy in Buenos Aires.

160 DA MSP RS PA, 1987, Argentina, F 8, 449777.

161 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F 5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/496.

162 Leaflet, personal archives of Josip Smolčić, Montevideo, Uruguay.

163 April 11, 1967, and April 10, 1970, Letter on the anniversary of April 10, HDM branch Dinka Domačinović in Uruguay, signed by President José Ivanic.

culture of their parents: "We fixed it as our mission to raise awareness in the Argentinian society that Croatia was not free, and it wanted to achieve independence from the Yugoslav mosaic."[164] The HDM was linked with the HOP and thus with SHUMS, youth organization founded in 1962 within Hefer's HOP, counting one hundred members in Buenos Aires in 1972 according to the Yugoslav embassy. They started organizing annual congresses in Uruguay in the 1960s, yearly gatherings of the HOP youth coming from Latin America (Chile, Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela), US, Canada, Austria, Great Britain, and Australia, and their coordinated activities.[165] They elected new leadership every three years at the general assembly. They regularly published their achievements in the *Hrvatska* journal, such as, for instance, in 1966, where they give an overview of their activities for the last period, mainly listing the coverage of the Argentinian and Uruguayan press of their activities.[166] Their congresses were also attended by observers from other "oppressed nations" representatives, such as the Armenians or Ukrainians, but also—for instance at the third SHUMS general assembly in 1968—Hoo-Che Shi, Chinese ambassador to Uruguay, José Pedro Martínez Bersetche, president of the Committee of Nations in the Fight Against Communism, and Carlos Rebollal Moreiras, representative of the Cuban refugees in Uruguay.[167] They regularly published the conclusions from their annual congresses. In 1972 they held their congress in Argentina (Paraná). Their events, usually press conferences, were attended by FAEDA members, and they also cooperated with a similar youth organization in Sao Paolo, Brazil.[168] Although with a lower profile, they existed at least until 1979, since they were sending Easter and April 10 greetings to their members and sympathizers, such as to Josip Smolčić from Uruguay by the SHUMS president, Srećko Majer, which concluded with "Za dom spremni!" ("Ready for the homeland!", the NDH era Ustaša salutation).[169]

There were also Croatian Catholic University Students (Hrvatski katolički sveučilištarci), working with the United Croatian Youth, who were affiliated

164 Carmen Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Krivodol Press, 2004), 185.

165 No. 99/1961, 12 August 1961, Letter to Josip Smolčić, SHUMS member from Uruguay regarding the organization of SHUMS Congress, signed by SHUMS President, Stjepan Asančaić, and Secretary Marko Holjevac.

166 "Savez ujedinjene hrvatske mladeži svijeta," *Hrvatska*, December 16, 1966, Year XIX, No. 12 (396), 2.

167 1968 SHUMS Congress leaflet.

168 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F 5, 131/72, Report on the Extreme Emigration from the SFRY in Argentina, December 1972, 5/496.

169 SHUMS, BsAs, March 21, 1979, letter to Josip Smolčić, Montevideo Uruguay, personal archive of Josip Smolčić.

with the HAKK, around twenty to thirty students. They regularly published bulletins. For instance, in 1964/1965 they published a booklet titled "Contemporary Croatian Problematics," from the roundtable organized with various politicians from the first generations, including Vrančić (then HOP), Korsky (HRS), and Crljen, "dedicated to all the students fallen for the freedom and sovereignty of the Croatian nation."[170] The preface of the publication states that the center of struggle for the Croatian people had been transferred from the homeland to "its exiled members, dispersed around the world," and that these were "new times with new needs," and that sovereignty would free Croatia from "foreign, almost colonial exploitation." Therefore, they decided to use the modern technique of organizing a public debate at the HAKK premises to reflect on how to achieve this goal. It is also the only youth organization that remains today, under the name of the Association of Croatian Catholic High School and University Students (Društvo hrvatskih katoličkih srednjoškolaca i sveučilištaraca—DHKSS), with different goals and activities.

In 1972, the United Croatian Youth (Ujedinjena hrvatska mladež—UHM) was in the process of formation, and they wanted "a clear break with the old generation who became detached and disunited from the community and forgot about its origins," probably referring to those who arrived in Argentina as adults after World War II. They also felt inspired by the student protests in the homeland—the Croatian Spring in 1971—so they declared:

> When we were arriving to Argentina, persecuted and hungry, we were all harmonious and in the fighting spirit. We fled from our dangers and difficulties and forgot about those who were left behind—whose children—your children and our brothers are still under persecution … Therefore, we do not understand any reason that would be so strong to justify the causes of unjustifiable discord … Thus, we cannot serve the ambitions of such persons, even if they were our own fathers. Today we feel the need to mobilize the whole Croatian emigration, because the Croatian Spring should not die.[171]

The UHM was officially founded on June 18, 1972, with the headquarters at the same address as Hrvatski dom, d.d. A special report on the anti-Communist

170 Hrvatsko-Argentinsko Društvo Sveučilištaraca—Asociación de Universitarios Argentino Croata. *Suvremena Hrvatska Politička Problematika* (1964, 1965), 70, http://www.studiacroatica.org/museum/0374/0374.htm.

171 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F 5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/498-9.

campaign in the Croatian community of the federal police of the province of Buenos Aires on the founding of this organization states that its members are "youth, children of Croats resident in the Argentinian Republic, fostering cultural activities, teaching Croatian language, geography and history, and organizing social and sport activities," but that their goal is also "a combative force against international Communism" and that in order to "prevent any Communist infiltration by the Yugoslav Embassy" they composed the statutes of the organization in order to avoid the twisting of their purpose.[172] Their goals were aligned with similar Croatian youth organizations in the US and Australia. With that purpose, they gathered around all the associations against "the Serbian-Communist regime" on December 2, 1972, to organize a "silent manifestation in the proximity of the Yugoslav embassy and in front of its building by guarding a minute of silence, after which they would burn the flag of the SFRY and then hoist a banner saying 'BLEIBURG,' a Croatian town, where communists shot 150,000 opposition members in 1945."[173] The purpose of the manifestation was to draw the attention of the Argentinian public to the perils of Communism. The UHM statutes state their aim of organizing Croatian youth in Argentina and the whole world. In annex II of the proclamation that organized a collective event on December 2, 1972—starting each paragraph with "Croats!" and ending the proclamation with "God and the Croats!"—they stress the destruction of Matica Hrvatska and the imprisonments of its leaders as a last chance of establishing an organized opposition in the homeland; therefore, the Croats in the world must elevate their voices. The proclamation was signed by a total of thirty-eight Croatian institutions, among them youth organizations, Hrvatski dom, the HOP and the HOP–R, the HAKK, and many journals. This was one of the last organized actions of the Croatian émigré community against the Yugoslav embassy before the arrival of the dictatorship.

The UHM was working together with Croatian Catholic Students (Hrvatski katolički studenti), a group counting around 150 members who were also in favor of a clear break with the old guard, according to the Yugoslav embassy, most probably linked to the HOP–R. This group set fire to the Embassy on Nov 29, 1971.[174] In a similar line, the Yugoslav embassy also commented on

172 Fondo DIPPBA, 256. Capital Federal, SIPPB, Partido Capital Federal, Legajo 256, Unión de Jóvenes Croatas, Informe Especial 6387/72.

173 Fondo DIPPBA, 256. Capital Federal, SIPPB, Partido Capital Federal, Legajo 256, Unión de Jóvenes Croatas, Informe Especial 6387/72. A mistake made by the police, wrongly locating Bleiburg in Croatia.

174 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina" December 1972, 5/499.

the news published in *Argentinisches Tageblatt* from June 29, 1964, on the trial against the HKB radical youth in West Germany, that "the authors of the attack whose slogan was 'acting instead of talking,' wanted to show that they pray to God and sing their folk songs, but this prayer was also followed by firearms training."[175] The HOP–R also counted with the Croatian Revolutionary Rightist Youth (Hrvatska revolucionarna pravaška mladež), which from time to time appeared with memorandums and declarations against the SFRY.[176]

In 1972, the Yugoslav embassy concluded that "youth Ustaša organizations are not very numerous, but they are very flexible and follow their leaders in the fight against SFRY. Ante Stier is trying to massify youth Ustaša organization that are left outside the old frames and organizations. The HOP split and in general mutual antipathy among the old guard led to the passivation of youth that was previously active."[177] Not all of them were Ustaša, but this is how the Yugoslav embassy labeled them, as if they were a homogenous group. However, they did have a common goal—the fight against socialist Yugoslavia—but their views on how to achieve this goal and the tactics applied were different. We can argue that the youth did not take over the fight, but already in the 1960s and well into 1980s the second generation stepped into the scene, joined the political activities, and complemented the usual rituals with some extraordinary actions, among them many violent ones, drawing from the origins of the Ustaša movement, but also inspired by the (curiously, leftist) revolutionary movements in the world at those times.

During the civil-military dictatorship (1976–83), the Croatian diaspora did not carry out any attacks on the embassy, but they were still active. On July 3, 1977, at a friendly football match between Argentina and Yugoslavia in Buenos Aires, before 60,000 spectators, the Croatian youth spread three huge banners: "Long live Argentina at the World Cup 1978," "Long live Argentina—long live Croatia," in Spanish, and "Long live free Croatia" in Croatian.[178] The Argentinian press, radio, and television reported on this action. According to the Yugoslav embassy, the banners were quickly removed.[179] In 1980, the Croatian youth freely distributed leaflets stressing that Yugo-Communism

175 DA MSP RS, PA, 1964, Argentina, F 2, 429384, July 3, 1964, N. 199/1964.

176 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/500.

177 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/501.

178 "Argentina—Jugoslavija 1:0. Protest hrvatske mladeži!," *Hrvatski narod*, July-August 1977, No. 134.

179 DA MSP RS, PA, 1977, Argentina, F 5, 443636.

was responsible for the death of more than a million Croats. With the changes on the political scene in Yugoslavia in the mid-1980s, Croatian youth in Argentina organized a series of activities and protests on the streets of Buenos Aires and in front of the Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires, especially in May, the anniversary of Bleiburg postwar killings, but also the attack on SFRY president Lazar Mojsov in 1987.

Publishing Activity

Apart from collaborating with the local press, political activity was accompanied by prolific publishing. The most important journals were *Hrvatska* (Croatia), launched in 1947, from 1956 the newspaper of the HOP, and *Hrvatski narod* (Croatian people) launched in 1966 by the HOP–R led by Vjekoslav Vrančić. The HRS's journal was *Republika Hrvatska* (Republic of Croatia). In terms of general domestic and international impact, the most important non-party journal was *Hrvatska revija* (Croatian review). Founded and published in Croatia in 1928 until 1945, it was relaunched in Buenos Aires in 1951 by Antun Bonifačić and Vinko Nikolić, who was its only editor in chief from 1955 until 1997. The journal later moved with him from Buenos Aires to Paris (1966), Munich (1967), and Barcelona (1977), and eventually to Croatia in 1991 where it continues to be published today. The émigré period of *Hrvatska revija* is also called *Nikolićeva revija* (Nikolić's Review). Nikolić was very active and turned *Hrvatska revija* into a full-fledged publisher of dozens of books covering émigré topics. The journal, as well as the books, are a valuable source of the topics and the discourse development of the Croatian political émigré community during the Cold War. Another relevant non-party cultural-political journal was *Hrvatska misao* (Croatian thought), whose editor in chief Marko Sinovčić published the journal for seventeen years (1953–70).

Sinovčić lists a total of thirty-one publications issued in the period from 1947 to 1990, but not all at the same time.[180] He lists ten newspapers, thirteen

180 Journals and the year of launching: *Glas Sv. Antuna* (1947), *Hrvatska* (1947), *Ave* (1948), *Gospa Sinjska* (1948), *Sloboda* (1949), *Hrvatska revija* (1951), *Republika Hrvatska* (1951), *Hrvatska smotra* (1951), *Hrvatska misao* (1953), *Izbor* (1953), *Hrvatska domobranska mladež* (1954), *Vidici* (1954), *Napredak -Napridak* (1955), *Slobodna riječ* (1956), *Hrvatske novine* (1956), *Hrvatska gruda* (1958), *Hrvatska mladež* (1959), *Ustaša* (1960), *Studia Croatica* (1960), *Hrvatski narod* (1966), *Svitlenik* (1968), *Ognjište* (1969), *Vijesnik Hrvatske seljačke stranke za Južnu Ameriku* (1969), *Rakovica* (1976), *Orao zlatnih krila* (1982), *Žetva* (1985), *Hrvatski rodoljub* (1985), *Glasnik Hrvatskog domobrana* (1986), *Hrvatski domobran* (1990), *Tjednik* (1990).

magazines, two religious newsletters, two bulletins, and four community magazines. Except for *Studia Croatica*, they are all published in Croatian, so they are for the internal use of the diaspora community. They are important places of memory since they shaped the diaspora narrative, not only in Argentina, but also worldwide, because of their global distribution. They covered all the relevant events among the Croatian émigré community, in Argentina and worldwide, and followed the main political parties and their discussions, mutual accusations and conflicts. They also covered the political situation in Yugoslavia and its foreign policy, and announced all the main commemorative events.

In 1960, the Croatian-Latin American Institute launched a journal in Spanish, *Studia Croatica*, targeted at Spanish-speaking countries to motivate other Croatian diaspora communities, especially in North America, to start publishing in English. The journal aimed to fight against "the enemy propaganda in the international public opinion, that presents us in a negative light, denying the survival of our Nation."[181] The Argentinian ministry of foreign affairs regularly bought two hundred copies of *Studia Croatica* quarterly. *Studia Croatica* published pieces about Yugoslav foreign policy, the right to Croatian independence, cultural pieces, etc. However, since it was published in Spanish, it was deemed a very important anti-Yugoslav propaganda tool: "Only this (very solidly made) review in Spanish has, for now, a wider perimeter of acting against SFRY than all our publications in Spanish directed to Argentina with the aim of objective informing."[182] *Studia Croatica* also published a book *La tragedia de Bleiburg: Documentos sobre las matanzas en masa de los croatas en Yugoeslavia comunista en 1945* (The tragedy of Bleiburg: Documents on mass killings of Croats in Communist Yugoslavia in 1945) in 1963. It was the first book on Bleiburg published in a foreign language, with summaries in English, German, French, and Croatian (see more in chapter 5 on commemorations).

The Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires was very well aware of diaspora's publishing activity and saw it as a dangerous tool for anti-Yugoslav propaganda. In its 1972 report, it stated that "Croatian extreme emigration in Argentina publishes its propaganda that reaches over 20,000 copies a month," and then listed the journals and their print run and publishing frequency, as well as their party affiliation and editors. It mentioned the recent launch of *Hrvatska straža*, that started being published in 1972, and said it "propagates

181 Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 217.

182 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972.

terrorism, meaning the renewal of the struggle after the death of Nahid Kulenović, former TRUP leader," but paid special attention to *Studia Croatica*, "with solid journalist editing, targeting intellectuals in Argentina and other countries. 'Intellectual crème de la crème' of Croatia political emigration collaborates in the journal, gathered in Croatian American Academy in New York, Croatian-American Cultural Club in Cleveland and the group of intellectuals around *Hrvatska revija* led by Vinko Nikolić." The report also lists Croatian émigré publications published elsewhere in the world and distributed in Argentina. It finishes the section with the following remark: "It is necessary to say the following truth: while Ustaša and other emigration supplied with literature and publications numerous important persons, institutions, university libraries etc. in Argentina, at the beginning of this year the Yugoslav embassy has carried out a survey in libraries, bookstores, universities etc. and proved that, unfortunately, there are no positive books about SFRY (but there are books written by Đilas, Stojadinović, Pavelić etc.)."[183] Many of the journals were published until the late 1980s. In 1990, only seven were still being published: *Studia Croatica* in Spanish, and six others in Croatian: *Republika Hrvatska*, *Ustaša*, and *Orao zlatnih krila*, the bulletin *Hrvatski rodoljub*, and newsletters *Hrvatski domobran* and *Tjednik*.

Contacts Between Franjo Tuđman and the Diaspora

Franjo Tuđman, later the first president of the Republic of Croatia, entered contact with the diaspora in the 1960s.[184] Čizmić divides his contacts with

183 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/527-532.

184 Franjo Tuđman was born in Veliko Trgovišće, Croatia, in 1922. In 1941, he joined the antifascist struggle in the partisan movement in Yugoslavia, and after World War II he carried out important military duties in the Yugoslav People's Army and ministry of defense in Belgrade. He obtained the rank of general major in 1960, and in 1961 he abandoned his military career. In 1961, he founded the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement and was its director until 1967, when he was (also) expelled from the Yugoslav League of Communists on grounds of anti-Marxist and nationalist accusations. He was sentenced to prison twice—in 1972, due to his contacts with the dissidents in the diaspora, and in 1981 for giving interviews to Western television channels where he questioned the official victim tally of the Ustaša extermination camp Jasenovac (700,000). He was also banned from public activities. He was released from prison in 1984 due to health issues, and in 1987 he got his passport back and soon traveled abroad to meet Croats in the diaspora (Canada, US, Western Europe). In 1989, he became the president of the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica—HDZ), a nationalist movement turned party which won the first multiparty elections in Croatia after the disintegration of the Yugoslav League of Communists in 1990. He was then elected the first president of the Republic

the diaspora into the clandestine phase (1966–87) and the public phase (1988–90).[185] In the capacity of director of the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement in Zagreb, he visited the US in 1966 and spent two months at the Harvard University International Seminar. He also met with members of the Croatian Fraternal Union, the oldest and largest Croatian organization in North America. According to his wife's (romanticized) memoirs, it was "the first encounter between a Croatian intellectual and Croatian political émigrés," and "it was a pleasure to see and hear people who love Croatia," concluding that they "can't get the dream of independent Croatia out of their head,"[186] and were "aware of everything and understand the situation better than many Croats who live in Croatia. They know that the situation is not as ideal as the Yugo-authorities are presenting it."[187] Tuđman's first contacts with the diaspora brought their attention to his writings. In 1970, as a reaction to his public debate with a former Serbian partisan general, Tuđman was labeled as "a Croat who opened his eyes,"[188] while Franjo Nevistić criticized "his fight for the equality of the Croatian nation within the conglomerate of the Yugoslav state,"[189] and his positive assessment of Croatian Communists in the struggle for national liberation and equality of the Croatian nation, arguing that it was the NDH that sought the same goal but had no other option but to seek support from the Axis powers.[190]

In 1971, on the twentieth anniversary of *Hrvatska revija*, Tuđman was awarded the journal's Jubilee Award for his *Big Ideas and Small Nations* for the best book in the homeland. It was appreciated for his unorthodox approach

of Croatia. Barcelona Centre for International Affairs—CIDOB, https://www.cidob.org/en/biografias_lideres_politicos/europa/croacia/franjo_tudjman.

185 Ivan Čizmić, "Prvo razdoblje suradnje Franje Tuđmana s hrvatskim iseljenicima," in *Društveno-povijesni kontekst političkog djelovanja u iseljeništvu: organizacije, stranke, pokreti*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj (Zagreb: IMIN, 2020), 287–302.

186 Ankica Tuđman and Jadranka Jureško-Kera, *Moj život s Francekom* (Zagreb: Večernji list, 2006), 118.

187 Tuđman and Jureško-Kera, *Moj život s Francekom,* 117.

188 Jakov Žižić, "'Hrvat je, koji je otvorio oči': Emigrantski intelektualci i političari o Franji Tuđmanu na stranicama časopisa Hrvatska revija," in *Međunarodni znanstveni skup Dijasporski i nacionalno manjinski identiteti: migracije, kultura, granice države*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj and Filip Škiljan (Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti, 2018), 277–302.

189 Franjo Nevistić, "Na putu Tuđmanove evolucije," *Hrvatska revija*, No. 4 (1970), 666. Franjo Nevistić worked at the NDH embassy in Rome from 1942 until the capitulation of Italy in 1943. In 1945, he was the commander of the university headquarters. In Argentina, he was the secretary of the Croatian Homeland Defenders, editor in chief of journals *Hrvatska* and *Studia Croatica*, and collaborator of *Hrvatska revija*. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 293.

190 Nevistić, "Na putu Tuđmanove evolucije," 673.

towards the issue of Croatian nationalism through a historical analysis of pan-Slavism and Yugo-Slavism, as well as his establishment that the Croatian issue had not been solved and that Croatian survival was in danger within Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, *Hrvatska revija* stated that the award did not mean "under any circumstances that we are awarding someone's partisan past (or present), their acceptance of communism as a worldview, and even to a lesser extent their Yugoslavism, that Croatian people decisively condemned and forever rejected as its political solution."[191] The two events, Tuđman's contacts with émigrés in the US in 1966 and the award, were used for the first trial against him for "conspiring against Yugoslavia" in 1972, when he was sentenced to two years in prison. In 1973, Bogdan Radica, who already lived in the US during World War II, reviewed Tuđman's book and stated that "One of the greatest flaws of the nationalist generation is that they did not do anything to show the free world the establishment of the NDH in 1941 … As if they felt a great burden. We had to wait for Tuđman to clarify why Croats aligned with Hitler and Mussolini because the biggest portion of the intelligentsia, active at that time, did not dare to speak up about it."[192]

After a clandestine trip and meeting with Swedish Croats in 1977, Tuđman "had a historical realization that the times are coming when Croatian people are going to have to decide on their destiny on their own soil with a tendency to overcome internal divisions and create unity of national thought and then actively unite the Homeland and Emigrated Croatia."[193] His book *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe*, published in English in 1981 in New York, was widely read. Hijacint Eterović, Dominican priest and philosopher from Chicago, stated that "surprisingly, Dr. Tuđman, a former partisan general is defending Croatian nationalism, while we know that in the last war the Croatian Communists were mortal enemies of the Croatian nationalists."[194] *Hrvatska revija* published Tuđman's book *Nacionalno pitanje u Srednjoj Europi* (National question in Central Europe) in 1981 and 1982, where the editor in chief Vinko Nikolić wrote in the preface: "We are not interested (nor bothered) if he is a Communist now. For us, it is above all important: *if and how can Dr. Tuđman be useful for the Croatian national struggle for Freedom*, and this is the only motive that brings us closer to him and his work."[195]

191 *Hrvatska revija*, no. 21 (1971), 4.

192 Bogdan Radica, "Od jugoslavenskih utopija do hrvatskih alternativa," *Hrvatska revija*, no. 2 (1973), 223.

193 Tuđman and Jureško-Kera, *Moj život s Francekom*, 199.

194 Čizmić, "Prvo razdoblje suradnje," 295.

195 Franjo Tuđman, "Nacionalno pitanje u Srednjoj Europi," *Hrvatska revija* (1982), 6.

In 1981, Tuđman was tried again for "counter-revolutionary activities" and sentenced to three years of prison. The émigré community closely followed the event. On that occasion, *Hrvatska revija* published that Tuđman gave "two smart, two scientific and two deeply patriotic speeches before a foreign Court, that are putting Dr. Tuđman in the front lines of Croatian national *leadership*."[196] On another note, Mate Meštrović wrote that "by defending himself from the allegations stated in the accusation, Tuđman presented irrefutable arguments for the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia, or, more precisely, for the establishment of a national state."[197]

In June 1987, Tuđman, "the most distinguished and the most popular Croatian Communist dissident,"[198] visited Toronto, Canada, where he held lectures and met with political émigrés from Canada and the US to coordinate the cooperation between the homeland and emigrated Croatia. Vjekoslav Vrančić commented: "with the mere accent on the fact that the essential element for the self-determination of the Croatian people is its historical right to a state and statehood awareness, Dr. Tuđman brought to the diaspora *a fresh air of patriotic feelings* pervading Croatia. With that, he confirmed our conviction on the inevitable development of historical events towards self-determination and state independence of the Croatian people, for which we are thankful."[199]

According to Čizmić, Tuđman was "the first to recognize the potentials of Croatian political emigration, united around the Croatian National Council (HNV) as the most representative political organization of emigrated Croats in the second half of the twentieth century."[200] On the other hand, the political emigration recognized the potential of Franjo Tuđman as the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union and the independence movement in the 1990s, the topic to be treated in chapter 6.

196 *Hrvatska revija*, no. 31 (1981): 360–61.

197 Mate Meštrović, *U vrtlogu hrvatske politike. Kazivanja Peri Zlataru* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2003), 299–300. Meštrović was a US-based journalist and academic, active in the émigré community in the 1980s, and president of the Croatian National Council. He was also the son of the world-famous Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović who emigrated to the US in the 1940s.

198 Bogdan Radica, "Tuđmanov privremeni let u slobodu," *Hrvatska revija*, no. 37 (1987): 603.

199 Vjekoslav Vrančić, "Osvrt na predavanja dr. Franje Tuđmana u Kanadi," *Hrvatska revija*, no. 38 (1988): 163.

200 Čizmić, "Prvo razdoblje suradnje…", 300.

5. Homeland Celebrations Far Away from Home

Abstract: The fifth chapter treats commemorations. Since the start of their arrival to Argentina in 1947 until today, Croats commemorate April 10, 1941, the foundation of the World War II Independent State of Croatia and May 15, 1945, the Bleiburg post-war killings. With the independence of the Republic of Croatia in 1991, they started commemorating new homeland celebrations while keeping the old ones. This chapter studies commemorative practices of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and analyses how and why they keep marking the old commemorations, and how they relate to and which meaning they ascribe to the new ones, as well as how the old and new celebrations are intertwined and interpreted by the generation of post-memory.

Keywords: commemorations, April 10, May15, November 29 counter-commemoration, new holidays

The political organizations and journals analyzed in the previous chapter disagreed in many aspects, but the community was united regarding commemorations. To understand these commemorative practices, I distinguish five major periods of memory from 1947 until today, showing how memory was shaped and transmitted across generations, with attention to continuities, discontinuities, and reconfigurations. Although the 1990s and 2000s are separately treated in chapters 6 and 7, for the sake of clarity of the reconfigurations and changes in memory transmission, the entire historicization of commemorations is offered in this chapter.

Settling and the Shaping of Memory (1947–60)

Since their arrival in Argentina, the Croatian émigré community started/continued commemorating three seminal events: April 10, the anniversary

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-6

of the establishment of the NDH in 1941; May 15, at the beginning also called the "May victims" (*svibanjske žrtve*), the Bleiburg postwar killings in 1945; and June 13, St. Anthony (*Antunovo*), commemorating two Croatian founding fathers named Ante (Anthony)—Ante Pavelić, the NDH Poglavnik, and Ante Starčević, considered the father of the homeland—also marking the day of the NDH armed forces.[1] These were not the only dates that they remembered. They also remembered the "June victims" (*lipanjske žrtve*), "September victims" (*rujanske žrtve*), and "December victims" (*prosinačke žrtve*). While the June and December victims marked pre-World War II events, the September victims were the Kavran group members, who were tried in Yugoslavia in August 1948 and executed in September 1948.[2] Later, as of 1960, they added a July victim, Dinka Domačinović, the victim of a bombing attack on the Croatian Home.

We can outline the meaning they ascribed to each event already in the first period: April 10 marks "the century-old dream" of Croats to have their own state, "a cry for freedom." Since the date is close to or overlaps with Easter, it also symbolizes the resurrection of the Croatian state—therefore it is a call to and a guide for future action: "Nobody has the right to make our political events from recent or remote past fall into oblivion or use them only at a declamatory level. They must be a living experience for us, and they should constantly serve us to formulate all our points of view and action at the level of internal and external politics."[3]

Bleiburg symbolizes an abrupt end of this cry for freedom, and it is inextricably linked to April 10 in an almost linear manner. April 10 ended in Bleiburg, while Bleiburg is a consequence of April 10, portrayed as a punishment for wanting an independent state. It is a day of mourning, year zero, and a foundational myth for their constitution as a community of exiles and victims, which allows them to erase the memory of the prior events, that is, the role and the atrocities of the NDH during World War II. Bleiburg is considered "the Tomb of Croatia, the bloodiest period of Croatian

1 Ante Starčević (1823–96) was a Croatian politician, and the founder of the Croatian Party of Rights, whose works are considered the foundations for Croatian nationalism.

2 The June victims mark June 20, 1928, when the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) representatives Stjepan Radić, Pavel Radić, Đuro Basariček, Ivan Granđa, and Ivan Pernar were assassinated in the national assembly of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. The December victims were killed and wounded on December 5, 1918, at Zagreb central square while protesting the Croatian accession to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes four days earlier. The December victims are considered martyrs for Croatian independence.

3 Ivo Oršanić, "Idemo jasnim putem," *Republika Hrvatska*, Vol 1/1951, 1–2.

history and its greatest defeat. The death of Bleiburg martyrs should be an oath to their ideals."[4]

They claimed St. Anthony as the patron saint of Croatia, like St. Patrick for Ireland, or St. James for Spain because he "gives us ten times the strength over our enemies. St. Anthony is our national holiday that most clearly reflects and connects the spirit of our two greatest Antes—the Father of the Homeland Ante Starčević and Poglavnik Ante Pavelić."[5] This is a fabrication and a fallacy, since in 1687 the Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*) chose Saint Joseph as the patron saint of the Croatian Kingdom and Croats. The same was confirmed at a Croatian bishops' conference in Split in 1972.[6]

In the case of Bleiburg and April 10, there would first be a Mass celebrated by a Croatian Franciscan, then the Croats would walk to an important square in Buenos Aires, the San Martín Square or the Plaza de Mayo central square. Then they would lay a wreath before the monument to General San Martín the Liberator of Argentina, or his tomb at the cathedral, or the May Pyramid, a symbol of Argentinian independence. The wreath would be flanked by youth wearing traditional costumes. In front of the monument, community dignitaries, usually HOP leaders, would give a speech in Croatian. At every commemorative Mass, the Jadran choir would sing Croatian songs.[7] In the case of April 10, they would have a gathering with speeches and a cultural program. This ritual has followed the same pattern until today, with minor variations. In the case of St. Anthony, there would be a Mass and a gathering afterwards. All the commemorative events were widely covered in the émigré journals, especially the HOP journal *Hrvatska*, since the HOP and the linked Croatian Home Guard were the organizers of commemorations.

The first April 10 celebration in Argentina was organized in 1948, establishing the rituality that is maintained today. On that April 10, Croatian construction workers of Barrio Perón had a special celebration, and Brother Metod Kelava held a holy Mass in a hall. On the same day in the evening, a conference was organized in the Croatian Home on Monte Street, and on Sunday, April 11, more than eight hundred Croats filled the crypt of the Church of the Holy Sacrament "together with Argentinians, Germans, Spaniards, Poles, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Italians, French,

4 *Hrvatska revija*, March 1955, Vol. 1.

5 "Naše Antunovo," *Hrvatski narod*, June 1972, no. 81, 2.

6 Croatian parliament website, "Reljef sv. Josipa u Saboru—podsjetnik na saborsku odluku iz 1687. Godine," accessed on March 22, 2025, https://www.sabor.hr/hr/o-saboru/povijest-saborovanja/zanimljivosti/reljef-sv-josipa-u-saboru-podsjetnik-na-saborsku-odluku.

7 Group interview with D.F., M.G., and D.V., the 1.5 generation, who arrived in Argentina as children (October 3, 2016), and analysis of *Hrvatska* and *Hrvatski narod* journals.

Lithuanians, Estonians, Bulgarians, and Austrians."[8] The Mass was served by the Franciscan priest, Brother Stjepan Rade, the Jadran choir sang church songs, and then Argentinian and Croatian anthems. After the Mass at the church, Croats filed through the streets with a wreath in the form of the NDH era coat of arms carried by the youth and followed by a multitude under umbrellas to lay the wreath at the monument of San Martín the Liberator because "his name has become a synonym of Argentinian independence."[9] The speech at the monument was given by Dr. Branko Benzon, in the 1940s a representative of the Ustaša movement to Nazi Germany who on March 31, 1941, delivered the memorandum in the name of Ante Pavelić to the minister of foreign affairs of Nazi Germany Joachim von Ribentropp asking for support in the creation of the NDH. He was also first NDH ambassador in Berlin, and later in Bucharest and Budapest.[10] Benzon said:

> at the feet of the Great Liberator, us, the Croats, coming from a distant land, where today the horizon of freedom has been lost, we have come here as refugees, as immigrants, or as exiles, but not because we have committed any crime; our only error was that in times of peace and in times of war we had a strong wish to be free in our free and independent state … Our independence was not a historical accident or a gift from God, it was a magnificent realization of a burning ideal kept for nine centuries and generations and generations of a free homeland and independent state.

We can observe that the victimization narrative they installed in Fermo continued in Buenos Aires, completely erasing the crimes and atrocities of the NDH during World War II from the collective memory, even from a high Ustaša official who was on the list of war criminals requested by Yugoslavia. He continued: "We were persecuted, mistreated and carried by the wind, and it was your country, the Argentinian Republic and its president general Juan Domingo Perón that gave a decent refuge and a new homeland to Croats, workers, craftsmen, engineers, physicians, peasants and priests," where they would remain waiting for their right to be free and have an independent state. He concluded his speech with: "Long live Perón! Long live great Argentinian people! Long live free Croatia!" *Hrvatska*, which reported on the event, concluded about the meaning of April 10: "The

8 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990* (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1991), 43.

9 "Hrvatska narodna duša. Osvrt na proslavu 10. travnja," *Hrvatska*, May 1, 1948, No. 9 (14), 1.

10 Zdravko Dizdar et al., eds., *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 34.

Croatian people had its Croatian state and we will have it again."[11] In the afternoon in Colegio San José, a "solemn academy" was held with around one thousand attendees, where they thanked presidents Perón, Truman (US), and Videla (Chile), as well as the forces of the Croatian resistance in the homeland.[12]

Since he arrived in Argentina in November 1948, Ante Pavelić presided over the April 10 celebrations. In 1956, after Perón was ousted and Pavelić was still in the country, a big celebration of a "Great Croatian April" was organized, marking the fifteenth anniversary of the NDH establishment, with "three thousand Croatian patriots, and representatives of seventeen brotherly nations," especially those behind the Iron Curtain.[13] After the holy Mass, a special delegation made of fifteen members laid a wreath before the statue of general San Martín, the Liberator, "who enjoys great reputation among Croats, who know how to appreciate the virtues of great patriots."[14] The celebration, "which electrified the attendees" started at 10:30 am in the elite Florida movie theater in Buenos Aires "in an exemplary order, with a perfect discipline."[15] The event started with the singing of the Argentinian anthem, after which they were addressed by Vjekoslav Vrančić in Spanish. The representative of the Albanian exiles group, José Luzay, also gave a speech on behalf of the International Anticommunist League for Latin America, "talking about the illusions of the West, that believed the red dragon," and at the very moment when he was emphasizing "that only one man has been constantly pointing to this danger for twenty years, Dr. Ante Pavelić," the Poglavnik entered the room, greeted with ecstatic applause, followed by "cheerful cries, excitement, people hugging each other."[16] Pavelić gave a long speech that was published on the front page of *Hrvatska*, first paying homage to the fallen, then thanking Argentina and peoples of other nations "where persecuted sons and daughters of Croatian people found refuge," but also stating that "during the recent internal political events in the Argentinian Republic our enemies raise severe, but untrue accusations that the members of Croatian Liberation Movement raised arms against the lives of Argentinian citizens and burned Catholic churches, thus committing the gravest crimes. However, an immediate investigation proved that these accusations were a shameful lie." He thanked the authorities for

11 "Hrvatska narodna duša. Osvrt na proslavu 10. travnja," *Hrvatska*, May 1, 1948, No. 9 (14), 1.
12 "Svečana proslava u Buenos Airesu," *Hrvatska*, May 1, 1948, No. 9 (14), 2.
13 "Hrvatski veliki travanj," *Hrvatska*, May 2, 1956, No. 8 (200), 1.
14 "Vienac pred spomenik Osloboditelja," *Hrvatska*, May 2, 1956, No. 8 (200), 2.
15 "Svečanost koja je elektrizirala prisutnike," *Hrvatska*, May 2, 1956, No. 8 (200), 2.
16 "Poglavnik, Poglavnik, Poglavnik..." *Hrvatska*, May 2, 1956, No. 8 (200), 3.

an objective and just investigation and the patriots and friends who gave them support, especially the Archbishop of Bosnia Ivan Šarić who sent the letter that was cited in chapter 4. Then he went on to say that the Croats in Argentina respect the laws of the country and that they do not meddle in its internal affairs but contribute to its development and flourishing with hard work and respectful behavior. After that he pointed to the biggest and most essential issue that concerned all the nations of the world, "the fatal peril of communism," stating that Argentina showed that it defends from it by signing an anti-Communist pact in Bogota, and then linking this anti-Communist fight with the NDH that gave "a proof of its implacable struggle against Communism," and that the Croats still see it as their duty, fighting against the evil that crushes freedoms, stating that the "Croatian nation has the right to its freedom and to its own independent state," stressing that the "Croatian Ustaša Liberation Movement is a unanimous reflection of this wish that was sublimated in the proclamation of NDH on 10 April 1941, and that HOP continues with its idea in the direction of the NDH reestablishment."[17]

Right after the assassination attempt on Pavelić in 1957, on April 14, 1957, a celebration was organized in the presence of three thousand people and eighteen representatives of foreign immigrants' communities. Also, Croats from different parts of Argentina arrived: Rosario, Córdoba, Mendoza, Comodoro Rivadavia, Mar del Plata, Bahía Blanca, and Montevideo. The speeches were given by Vjekoslav Vrančić (in Spanish), and Ivan Asančaić (in Croatian), followed by the representatives of Armenian, Hungarian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Caucasus communities. Vrančić thanked the people who received them "when we lost our National State, as a consequence of World War II, and when we turned into exiles dispossessed of every human right." As soon as they found refuge and peace, they were again attacked or defamed by "the enemies of Croatian people, trying to use the revolutionary successes, to falsely accuse us with the aim of inflicting material, moral and political damage on us," which were dismantled by an official investigation, stating the Croatian community in Argentina "represents a politically healthy and economically progressive nucleus." He linked the Croatian struggle with the general fight for freedom from Communism of all the oppressed peoples whose representatives attended the celebration, making references to attempted revolutions in June 1953 in East Berlin, and in Poznan on October 23, 1956, linking them to the April 10, 1941 "anti-Communist revolution" of Croatia led by "its most selfless and most deserving son, Member of Parliament and Head of the Croatian Liberation Movement, Doctor Ante Pavelić". The speech concluded

17 "Poglavnik, Poglavnik, Poglavnik..." *Hrvatska*, May 2, 1956, No. 8 (200), 3.

by stating that the celebration of the NDH was a protest against the Yugoslav regime imposed by force and expressing the wish and the right to live in an independent Croatian state." Among others, a message from Ante Pavelić was read, stating: "Croatian brothers and sisters: our enemy is worried about the increasingly determined resistance of Croatian people, which threatens its very existence. Our enemy tried to use our biggest homeland celebration—10 of April— for his criminal aims. His intention was unsuccessful, but the decision of Croatian people to free itself and reestablish its Independent State of Croatia will be successful. Croatian Liberation Movement, together with the Croatian people will soon achieve its victory."[18]

With a similar rituality, but with a mourning narrative, the Bleiburg commemorations were held regularly. While commemorations served to pay tribute to the fallen, with the focus on the victims, the journals show that the narrative in the first period was not at all unanimous, and that they concentrated on the trauma of defeat and the lost cause. This is best illustrated in the *Hrvatska revija* editorial published on the eve of the tenth anniversary of Bleiburg, with a title paraphrase from Simonides's epitaph to the soldiers who died fighting Persians at Thermopylae, Greece: "Go tell the Spartans, stranger passing by, that here, obedient to the laws of the Homeland, we lie."[19] The editorial labeled Bleiburg as the "Tomb of Croatia," the bloodiest period of Croatian national history and its greatest defeat. These heroes, who won all the battles but lost a war, did not have their Leonidas to help them save the honor and the freedom of Croatia. It further said:

> This is not the place, nor the occasion to talk about who is to blame for Bleiburg. Neither who took us and led us through that porch of terror and horror, worse than Dante's Inferno. One thing is sure, and it must be stressed every time, that such a heroic army did not deserve that treason and such an ending. The victors of a four-year war did not deserve such death and humiliation… History will tell its final word and it will judge those who, with their myopia, selfishness and negligence, caused that we were sadly and tragically taken out of Croatia. Because Bleiburg is just a consequence. This mountain of corpses is sticking out and crying to Heaven as an accusation and a premonition.[20]

18 *MRECIC Report on the celebration of the 16th anniversary of the renewal of the Independent State of Croatia*, Secretary General of Croatian Home Guard Pedro Krilanović (signed).

19 "'Stranče, javi Špartancima da smo ovdje pali, jer smo se pokoravali zakonima Domovine', Prigodom 10.-god. hrvatske narodne tragedije", *Hrvatska revija*, Year V, March 1955, Vol. 1., 7-9.

20 "'Stranče, javi Špartancima da smo ovdje pali, jer smo se pokoravali zakonima Domovine', Prigodom 10.-god. hrvatske narodne tragedije", *Hrvatska revija*, Year V, March 1955, Vol. 1., 7-9.

While falsely claiming that the NDH was really a victorious regime during World War II that was eventually betrayed, not clearly by whom, probably international actors, the editorial concludes that the death of Bleiburg martyrs should be an oath to their ideals.

At the same time, already in 1952 Croatian political emigration began with clandestine commemorations in the same Bleiburg field in Austria. A handful of people met twice a year: May 15 and All Saints' Day. In 1953, the Bleiburg Honorary Battalion was founded, which began to organize the commemorations in an increasingly open way, finally purchasing the first plot in the Bleiburg field of 2,000 square meters in 1965. The entire Croatian diaspora, including that of Argentina, participated in the collection of the money for the purchase of the plot.[21] Until the mid-1960s, the Austrian authorities began to tolerate the commemoration. In addition: "Because of their regular nature, the Bleiburg commemorations served a useful purpose for the Yugoslav State Security Service. Commemorations obviously brought together a considerable number of people and provided an occasion for prominent members of the émigré community to hold speeches in which they expressed their political views. As such, the commemorations provided the Yugoslav State Security Service with a 'who's who of the anti-Yugoslav emigration' in Austria and West Germany and a convenient way of gauging émigré sentiments."[22]

In 1960, marking the fifteenth anniversary, Bareza stressed the futility of the Bleiburg victims and the shame for fleeing Croatia instead of offering resistance: "The essence of Bleiburg is that they died for nothing," so it is a "sin of Croats against Croats."[23] The conclusion was that Bleiburg was a lesson, and that the Croatian state would be resurrected only if Croats returned and made Croatia independent. Thus, Bleiburg became the symbol of the diaspora's exile and a political commitment to return. This narrative was constantly reinforced through commemorations.

Closing Ranks and Turning to the World (1960–70)

After settling, surpassing the language barrier, and accepting Argentina as their new home, with no hope of returning soon, the Croatian diaspora

21 Group interview with D.F., M.G., and D.V., the 1.5 generation, who arrived in Argentina as children, October 3, 2016.

22 Christian Axboe Nielsen, "The Yugoslav State Security Service and the Bleiburg Commemorations," *Politička misao* 55, no. 2 (2018): 50–70, 56.

23 Petar Bareza, "Bleiburška katastrofa, Prigodom 15. godina velikog hrvatskog exodusa," *Hrvatska revija* 1, no. 37 (1960): 34.

shifted the focus of attention. The *Studia Croatica* journal was launched, targeted at Spanish-speaking countries, with the aim to fight against "the enemy propaganda in the international public opinion, that presents us in a negative light, denying the survival of our Nation."[24] This is how the idea of a book on Bleiburg was born. The book, *La tragedia de Bleiburg*, marked a turning point in the diaspora's memory of Bleiburg, from an endogenous use of collective memory to its dissemination worldwide, from dissonant voices to a unisonous narrative. *La tragedia de Bleiburg* became a baseline of the Bleiburg narrative in the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and the world for many decades. Published at the height of the Cold War and US anti-Communist policy, and in view of the new Communist threat in Latin America, the book framed Bleiburg as a part of a global Communist plan to exterminate the opposition, claiming that 200,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in May 1945, and therefore labeling Bleiburg as the Croatian Superkatyn,[25] while the NDH Army was depicted as Croatian opposition to Communist rebellion supported by the Soviets. With this book, the Croatian political émigrés re-signified themselves as victims of Yugoslav propaganda and reframed their own role in World War II.

Interestingly, the book also mentions other victims, but it does not precisely mention that these victims died at the same time and the same place, and some also at other places: "in 1945 Yugoslav Communist also massacred 12,000 Slovenian anti-Communist combatants, several thousand of Serbian Četniks and Montenegrin nationalists, as well as ethnic minorities."[26]The book also contains supplements on "The Tragedy of the Slovene People", "The Extermination and Expulsion of German Ethnic Minority from Yugoslavia", and "Collective Killings of Montenegrin Nationalists."[27]

While the term "Bleiburg victims" (*bleiburžke žrtve*) was widely used among the first-generation diaspora community in Argentina, the term "tragedy" coined by the book was later accepted when referring to Bleiburg. On the twentieth anniversary of Bleiburg, Korsky already labeled the event as a tragedy and stated that Bleiburg was a pledge for a better future, and a

24 Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji*, 2 vols. (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1983), 217.

25 This is a reference to the Katyn forest massacre of Polish army officers carried out by the Soviet secret police NKVD in 1940, known about already in the fifties due to the US Congress Committee Report on the Katyn Forest Massacre in 1952.

26 *La tragedia de Bleiburg. Documentos sobre las matanzas en masa de los croatas en Yugoeslavia comunista en 1945*. (Buenos Aires: Studia Croatica, 1963), online version: www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/010/010.htm.

27 *La tragedia de Bleiburg,* online version: www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/010/010.htm.

lesson.[28] Bleiburg was interpreted as an extermination of freedom-loving anti-Communist Croats by Yugoslav Partisans. In line with the book's narrative, the responsibility of the NDH leadership disappeared. Again, the Bleiburg tragedy was read as an indelible mark on the new generation who did not experience Bleiburg, with a hope that this new generation would learn a lesson and shape their political activity accordingly.

Regarding April 10, in 1964 the fragmentation was so strong that the members of the Croatian National Resistance decided to have a separate celebration.[29] On the twenty-fifth anniversary after the recent HOP split in January 1966, they recognized that "even after twenty-five years of exile and slavery of Croatia we have not been capable of establishing a unitary political leadership … only unity, program clarity and firmness of our decision will make possible that a second April 10 happens, as a fruit of persistent, selfless and common struggle of the homeland and exiled Croatia."[30] In 1965, amid these conflicts and fragmentations, the St. Anthony commemoration was organized by the Croatian Home Guard, with a solemn lecture attended by many officials and especially many members of youth organizations. The message was: "Croatian St. Anthony means resistance until death! Resistance until Croatian victory. It means tireless renewal of the Independent State of Croatia. It means an imminent death of any Yugoslav dungeon!"[31]

The commemorations kept the usual rituality: after a Mass at a church, where the Jadran choir would sing, they would lay a wreath at the San Martín or May Square with a speech by a distinguished member of the community and a later gathering. At the April 10 celebration in 1967, a speech was given by Apeles Márquez, the president of FAEDA, who stressed a common fight with the Croatian nation against international Communism. In 1969, the April 10 Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Antonio Caggiano, Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Primate of Argentina, according to a Yugoslav embassy report "supporting the fight and the goals of Ustaša migration and calling for their unity so that 'in the future they could live freely and legally in their own country to which they have a full right as its children.'" This caused a reaction of by the Yugoslav ministry of foreign affairs that decided to "draw attention to the representative of the Holy See regarding this issue."[32] In this period, after the death of Ante Pavelić on December 28, 1959, they added

28 Ivo Korsky, "Bleiburg," *Hrvatska revija*, No. 1–2 (1965), 1–6.

29 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1964, F2, Telegram, No. 119, 10.4.1964.

30 *Hrvatski narod*, Apr 10, 1966, No. 1–2, 1–2.

31 "Hrvatsko Antunovo," *Hrvatska*, July 8, 1965, No. 6 (378), 1.

32 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1969, F5, 414159/2U, April 25, 1969, Telegram from II Directorate to the SFRY Legation to the Holy See.

another date to mark every year—his "passage to eternity," with a Mass and a gathering with commemorative speeches and a regular publication on his political messages.

Hope and Action (1970s and 1980s)

By the 1970s, the Croatian diaspora was well integrated into Argentinian society, while simultaneously retaining its own identity. The children born in Argentina were already grown up and participating in the local society. The first generation maintained the organization of commemorations, but the community could not live isolated from the events happening in Argentina. They were in line with the Argentinian military dictatorship because of the common anti-Communist cause. It was common to see representatives of the Argentinian military and police at the April 10 commemorations, as well as representatives of anti-Communist associations. In 1970, during the military dictatorship of General Onganía, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bleiburg, the Croats organized a press conference, and two main newspapers, *Clarín* and *La Razón*, published articles on Bleiburg blaming Tito and international Communism.[33] In 1971, with the Croatian Spring movement "at home," the hope arose that their dream of an independent Croatia might come true, and they were especially proud that the Yugoslav judiciary blamed the diaspora for the "inspiration" of this movement.[34]

The second generation also stepped into the scene and complemented the usual rituals with some extraordinary actions, again without any obstruction by the dictatorship in power (1976–83). Also, despite the prohibition of public gatherings, the Croats could freely organize their commemorations, even accompanied by the orchestra of the Argentinian police cavalry in 1979.[35] In 1980, the Croatian youth freely distributed leaflets "stressing that Yugo-Communism was responsible for the death of more than a million Croats."[36]

While the civil-military dictatorship (1976–83) was not a problem for the Croatian diaspora because of the common anti-Communist ideology, the Malvinas War in 1982 represented a new traumatic experience for the whole community, but especially for the second generation that was already

33 "Bleiburg optužuje," *Hrvatski narod*, May 1970, No. 56.
34 *Hrvatski narod*, June 1972, No. 81, 3.
35 *Hrvatski narod*, April-May 1979, No. 154–155, 4.
36 *Hrvatski narod*, May 1980, No. 165, 3.

grown up. This trauma made the new generation step in, re-signifying and reinterpreting Bleiburg from the current and traumatic moment in Argentinian history, which ended in defeat of Argentina by the United Kingdom. On May 15, 1982 they hung a banner at the pedestrian bridge near the Faculty of Law in Buenos Aires and other city streets with intense traffic, saying: "Bleiburg 15-5-1945—Yugoslavia massacres 300,000 Croats handed over by England," thus linking the current war in Argentina, their country of birth and reception, with the feeling of betrayal of the Croats at Bleiburg by the British Army, a live memory that they grew up with.[37]

In 1983, with the end of the dictatorship and the transition to democracy, the wave of local demands for truth, memory, and justice for the victims of an enforced disappearance manifestly affected the second generation of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina, which adopted its memory practices. On the fortieth anniversary of Bleiburg in 1985, Argentine-Croat students filled the streets of the Buenos Aires center with posters accusing Yugoslavia of responsibility for the massacre and distributed thousands of leaflets referring to "300,000 disappeared" in Bleiburg, making a connection to local current affairs. At the same time, the community announced that "there is a new awakening in Croatian patriotic feeling, and a clear political concept reflected in the awareness that the Yugoslav state represents slavery and mortal peril for the Croatian people, whose guarantee of preservation, development, wellbeing, freedom, and dignity for their children … is only in our own state."[38]

The Counter-Commemorations of November 29

The Croatian political émigré community in Argentina also consistently "marked" another date, November 29, Yugoslav statehood day—or "the Day of the Republic" (Dan Republike). Officially it marked the second session of the Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije – AVNOJ), held at Jajce, Bosnia and Herzegovina on November 29, 1943, when the constitutive assembly adopted the declaration on the proclamation of the republic. But for Croatian political émigrés, it had an opposite meaning—the start of the oppression of

37 "La juventud croata en Buenos Aires protesta," *Studia Croatica*, Vol. 84–85, June 1982, accessed June 29, 2024, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/084/084.htm.

38 "Editorial: A cuarenta años del genocidio de Bleiburg," *Studia Croatica*, Vol. 97, April–June 1985, accessed June 29, 2024, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/097/097.htm.

Croatia. On or around this day, the Croats would usually organize a counter celebration, carrying out some act to draw the attention of local public opinion. Also, at times they would commemorate Bleiburg in front of the Yugoslav embassy, to point to the responsibility for the postwar killings.

The first such act was observed in 1958 in the proximity of Hotel Plaza where the embassy held a reception, when "the Ustaša were distributing leaflets and getting ready to throw stones at the Embassy personnel," but they were soon removed by the Argentinian ministry of foreign affairs, according to the embassy report.[39] The authors of the attack, the Croatian Revolutionary Youth (Hrvatska revolucionarna mladež), informed in *Hrvatska* that, while Ambassador Fejić was greeting his guests, a young man in a suit approached him with a bouquet of flowers and an accompanying message in Croatian and Spanish: "Lay these flowers on the graves of 150,000 Croatian martyrs murdered in May and June 1945 by the order of Yugoslav oppressors to whom you—even though you are a Croat by blood—serve loyally. Croatian Revolutionary Youth." *Hrvatska* also reported that "Croatian and Argentinian anti-Communist youth distributed 20,000 flyers in the streets of city center clarifying about the real meaning of 29 November," that is presenting their narrative of being victims of Yugoslav Communist persecution. *Hrvatska* also wrote that local newspapers such as *Crítica*, *Noticias Gráficas*, *Buenos Aires Herald*, and *Freie Presse* reported about this action and clarified about the HRM message delivered to the Yugoslav ambassador, stating that "Croats paid homage to their fallen."[40]

There were attacks at the embassy on November 29, 1963,[41] and an attempt at breaking up the Yugoslav statehood day celebration in 1965.[42] In 1965, the HOP published a declaration regarding "a 'conspirators' meeting turned into Statehood Day," stating that Yugoslavia wanted to present to the world as if all the constitutive peoples joined it voluntarily, while this was a notorious lie and that the real representatives of the Croatian people and its wish for an independent state was the HOP, "requiring a reestablishment of an independent and sovereign CROATIA."[43] The statement was signed by Pavelić's successor in the HOP, Stjepan Hefer. In 1969, the Yugoslav embassy reported that on the night between November 28 and 29 "a group of Ustaša

39 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1958, 429510, No. 215/1958, December 1, 1958.

40 "Hrvatska revolucionarna mladež prosvjeduje," *Hrvatska*, December 16, 1958, Year XI, No. 22–24, 261–263, 2.

41 DA MSP RS PA, Argentina, 1963, F5, 3 December 1963, 209/1963, attack at the Embassy.

42 DA MSP RS, PA, 1973, Argentina, F.5, 131/72, "Report on the Extreme Emigration from SFRY in Argentina," December 1972, 5/533.

43 *Hrvatska*, November 24, 1965, Year XVIII, No. 10, front page.

youth organization SHUMS, wrote slogans against Comrade Tito and our country on the Embassy façade, stained the entrance and the car of the First Secretary Mrša. The next day on 29 November at 10 am probably the same group were carrying banners and shouting slogans against our country and distributing leaflets to the passersby. They were soon removed by the police, but the local press gave it a lot of publicity, while the celebration of our holiday was practically ignored."[44]

In the 1970s, with the rise of acts of Croatian radical groups around the world, the attacks in Buenos Aires also turned more violent. On the eve of Nov 29, 1971, they set fire in the consulate,[45] and in 1972, on December 2, 1972, they threw bottles of black paint at the building.[46] The author of this attack was the UHM youth group (Ujedinjena hrvatska mladež), who announced to the federal police that on December 2, 1972, they would protest against "the Serbian-Communist regime" to organize a "silent manifestation in the proximity of Yugoslav embassy and in front of its building by guarding a minute of silence."[47] The purpose of the manifestation was to draw attention of Argentinian public opinion to the perils of communism. However, it turned out to be more than just a silent protest, since the Yugoslav embassy reported that later, on the eve of November 29, the UHM printed three thousand posters saying "Yugoslavia will collapse," and posted them at the places with dense traffic, and also burned the Yugoslav flag in front of the embassy, and that there was also a false bomb threat.[48] The incident was reported by *Crónica* newspaper, stating that there was an attack on the Yugoslav embassy and two tar bombs were thrown at the embassy façade by a group that participated in an event organized by the Croatian community in the Church of El Salvador, and after the mass arrived at the embassy, shouted against the government of Marshall Tito and then attacked. They spread after the police arrived.[49] However, émigré journal *Hrvatska* reported that there was a "big Croatian protest assembly in Buenos Aires against Yugoslav occupation" in the hall of the Institute of El Salvador, organized by thirty-eight organizations of Croatian emigration community in Argentina. The speeches were held by different representatives of the

44 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1969, F. 5, 442846, December 1, 1969, Embassy to MFA, No. 171/1969.

45 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1971, F. 4, 444246, December 1, 1971, Embassy to MFA, No.129/1971.

46 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1972, F. 4, 442413.

47 Fondo DIPPBA, 256. Capital Federal, SIPPB, Partido Capital Federal, Legajo 256, Informe Especial 6387/72.

48 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1973, F. 5, 45839, 7 December 1972, 2/73, Note on the meeting with MFA Head of Department for Eastern Europe, Ruben Ferreyra and his deputy José Bautista Gago.

49 "Ataque a la Embajada de Yugoslavia," *Crónica*, December 3, 1972.

first and the second generation, and the speakers stressed that "Serbian imperialism is hiding behind the communist government whose goal is to turn Yugoslavia into Great Serbia, depriving the Albanian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian people their right to self-determination."[50]

As said in chapter 4, the diaspora ceased attacks on the embassy during the dictatorship, making it "completely satisfied with the intervention regarding 29 November celebration, since all the public and enemy manifestations against SFRY have been banned."[51] After the dictatorship ended, the acts resumed, and they were mostly carried out by youth that was inspired by the local civil society organizations, and adopted their commemorative practices. On the eve of the fortieth anniversary of Bleiburg on May 13, 1985, they covered Yugoslav embassy walls with "forty to fifty posters saying 'Massacre, Yugoslavia killed 300,000 Croats.' In the middle of the poster is a map of Europe and Yugoslavia stabbing Croatia with a bloody hand and a dagger. Below that it was saying: '1945-15 May-1985 40th anniversary of Bleiburg.' At the bottom of the leaflet, it said 'Croatia must regain its independence' with Croatian coat of arms on the left."[52] The same posters were hung around the city center. When Croatia became independent in the 1990s, the Croatian diaspora ceased with acts against the Yugoslav embassy and continued with the celebration of the old dates, while integrating the new homeland celebrations.

A Dream Come True: Croatian Independence (1990s)

The Croatian independence marked another turning point. For the diaspora community it was a moment when the dream of an independent homeland came true. Moreover, it was a moment when the diaspora community thought that the underground memory of Bleiburg, which they kept for so long, would erupt undisputed and that it would finally gain the status it deserved. However, since the war broke out, they understood that Bleiburg was not a priority, and they perceived the Homeland War as a continuation of their fight in World War II for Croatian independence. So, they continued to commemorate both Bleiburg and April 10, which in their opinion was unjustly

50 "Velika Hrvatska prosvjedna skupština u Buenos Airesu," *Hrvatska*, Year XVI, No. 12 (468), December 1972, 6.

51 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1976, F5., Consular Department-1976 report, 469469, 75/76, December 16, 1976, 21.

52 DA MSP RS, PA, Argentina, 1985, F.10, 424676, May 15, 1985, No. 239/1985.

ignored. Although starting in 1990, the Bleiburg field in Austria was no longer a place exclusively for emigration, and Croats from Croatia began to attend the annual commemorations, President Franjo Tuđman never participated in the commemorations, and until 1994 he practically ignored them.[53] His national project, however, consisted of an all-Croat reconciliation. Inspired by Franco's Valley of the Fallen, Tuđman wanted to re-signify Jasenovac, the World War II death camp where some 80,000–100,000 Serbs, Jews, Roma, and antifascist Croats had been killed by the Ustaša, and transform it into an all-Croat burial site where he would transfer the remains of Ustaša, as well as those killed during the Homeland War.[54]

Starting in 1995, the Croatian Parliament began to sponsor the commemorations. In 1996, the Croatian Parliament proclaimed the Sunday closest to May 15 as the Day of Remembrance of the Croatian Victims in their Struggle for Freedom and Independence,[55] but senior state officials only began participating in commemorations in 2000, after Tuđman's death in December 1999. Since there was a new Croatian state and a new date of independence, already in 1991 the Croatian diaspora in Argentina started questioning whether it was necessary to keep celebrating April 10 and remembering the NDH, but decided to continue because:

> for forty-five years the Croatian people was subject to a continuous Yugoslav-Communist propaganda … after so many years of brainwashing it is necessary to participate in the search for truth regarding the declaration of Croatian independence and the related events … It is a historical truth that the NDH, in spite of all its flaws, was Croatian and it was a state, while it was independent to the extent possible. It is also a historical truth that the Croatian Communist Party did not fight against the Ustaša regime only, but it tried and managed to destroy the Croatian state and established Yugoslavia, and within it a reduced Croatia without Bosnia and Herzegovina.[56]

53 Tamara Banjeglav, "The Bleiburg Commemoration in Croatian Parliamentary Decisions," conference paper, Workshop: Bleiburg & Beyond. Transnational Approaches Towards Memory Politics and Commemorative Practices, Graz: Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz, 2016.

54 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Flirting with Fascism: The Ustaša legacy and Croatian Politics in the 1990s," in *The Shared History and the Second World War and National Question in Ex-Yugoslavia* (Novi Sad: CHDR, 2008).

55 Zakon o blagdanima, spomendanu i neradanim danima u Republici Hrvatskoj, April 25, 1996 (Official Gazette no. 33/1996), www.nn.hr.

56 Kazimir Katalinić, "10 de abril de 1941," *Studia Croatica*, No. 131, August 1996, accessed June 29, 2024, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/131/131.htm.

Here we can observe a change in the narrative, a revision of how independent the NDH really was, and that there is also an allusion to "all its flaws," downplaying the mass killings and death camps. Also, there is a recognition of Croatian Communists as Croats, but they were against "the Croatian state," meaning the Nazi puppet Ustaša regime, responsible for destroying it and even reducing its territory.

In 1994, *Studia Croatica*, the only remaining journal in Argentina, considered whether to keep publishing or not, and eventually decided to continue, "convinced of the imperious need to keep informing the public opinion on the Croatian nation and the Republic of Croatia, still threatened by the enemy disinformation."[57] So, it was necessary to keep fighting and commemorating, linking April 10 to the current events in Croatia because "without 10 April and without the historic experience and the example of the Independent State of Croatia, today we would not have had the independent Republic of Croatia … The time will come when a new generation, without any complex for its own guilt or mistakes, will justly value the Revolution of 10 April, as well as the period of the Independent State of Croatia."[58] Until that day would come, they vowed to continue marking the date. They added new homeland celebrations such as Croatian statehood day (May 30 in the 1990s) and kept the old commemorations with the same rituality: the Mass, the wreath-laying, and a gathering with speeches. In May 1993, Danijel Crljen, member of the NDH delegation at Bleiburg in May 1945, gave a speech titled "The Truth about Bleiburg," his testimony on the negotiations and the aftermath. Crljen died soon thereafter, as did many Bleiburg survivors and members of the first generation who had come to Argentina as adults.

The celebration of Croatian statehood day was marked at the embassy and in 1994 when the first Croatian ambassador to Argentina was appointed,[59] but before the official celebration on Sunday, May 29, the Union of Croatian Associations of the Argentine Republic (Unión de Asociaciones Croatas de la República Argentina, UACRA) organized the community's tribute to the national day, at the Cardinal Stepinac School in Hurlingham, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. The celebration began with a Mass celebrated by Croatian priest Ilija Kozina, followed by speeches by Jasna Müller de Terrazas, UACRA president, and the ambassador, Matko Medo. As reported

57 *Studia Croatica*, January–March 1994, Vol. 124, accessed June 29, 2024, http://www.studia-croatica.org/revistas/124/124.htm.

58 Kazimir Katalinić, "10 de abril de 1941."

59 At first the representative of the Republic of Croatia was Ivo Rojnica. See more in the next chapter.

by *Studia Croatica*, "Mr. Ivan Milas, president of the Croatian Heritage Foundation and former vice president of the government of the Republic of Croatia, traveled especially from Croatia for this commemoration, who exalted the significance of the activity of Croatians residing in Argentina, in the process of liberation of Croatia."[60]

The Post-Memory Generation: Imaginary and Planetary Croats

The new millennium marked another point of inflection for the memory of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina. The perishing of the old generation gave way to a definitive change of generations, with the post-memory generation as new memory entrepreneurs. This new generation did not personally experience the events they commemorate, but these memories were "transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right … To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present."[61]

The memory of the post-memory generation became exacerbated with the disappearance of the first generation. They started attending commemorations with more zeal, taking ownership of the memories to reinforce their identity. A phenomenon similar to the descendants of the Holocaust survivors occurred, as Finkielkraut explains in his book *The Imaginary Jew*: "Others have suffered and I, because I was their descendant, harvested all the moral advantage … Since the actors had been annihilated, it was left to their narrator, their heir, their offspring to appropriate the reaction of their audience… I owed to the bond of blood this intoxicating power to confuse myself with the martyrs. Lineage made me genocide's huckster, its witness and practically its victim."[62] They were brought up in a bubble, made to

60 "Celebración de la Fecha Nacional Croata en la República Argentina," *Studia Croatica*, June 1994, Vol. 125, accessed June 28, 2024, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/125/125.htm#_Toc269234244.

61 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

62 Alain Finkielkraut, *The Imaginary Jew* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 11–12.

believe that they were descendants of innocent victims and survivors of a tragedy (Bleiburg), the chosen people, the real Croats who had to leave their country only because they aspired for an independent state, while all the accusations of crimes and atrocities committed by the regime in which their parents or grandparents participated, or were committed by their ancestors themselves, were portrayed as a complot, propaganda, and fake accusations by Yugoslav Communists. Because during their upbringing they almost never faced the truth, they believed that they were in an even worse position than the Jews, because "their holocaust" was not acknowledged.

This is how the Croats in Argentina preserve their identity and their singularity. What makes them singular are the "old dates" they celebrate and preserve, because in Croatia they did not yet get the recognition they believe that these dates deserved. Now that the homeland is free, they also celebrate its new holidays, but they don't completely own them. They did not grow up with the new celebrations and to some extent they need some materiality. This is where new technologies fit in because they allow them to "be instantly connected to the events in every part of the world. Therefore, no matter where [they] are, [they] can contribute to the development of Croatian Nation that [they] form part of."[63] As a result, the post-memory generation established radio shows, websites, and Facebook pages and regularly informs the community on what is happening in Croatia. They also redefined their position in the diaspora and towards the homeland:

> Almost half of us are abroad, and half of us are in Croatia … We should contemplate how to exercise this Croatness, while being "planetary Croats," as Croatian physicist Davor Pavuna calls it. We are planetary Croats, especially having in mind the possibilities of the new technologies. I am convinced that many people in Croatia don't follow the news from Croatia like many of us abroad … We should also have in mind that they have not lived in freedom. It was not us who lived in a dictatorship, but them. And we can contribute a lot in that sense.[64]

The author of these words, a member of the second generation, completely disregards that Argentina had four coups d'etat and dictatorships since the

63 Jurica Dragicevic, second generation, speech at the celebration of April 10 in 2015, accessed Sep 3, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/unioncroata2017/posts/787887348051410.

64 Tomislav Frkovic, second generation, Reflections on the present and the destiny of Croatian Community in Argentina, November 27, 2016, Buenos Aires, Croatian House, accessed Jun 29, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DR2IvqU6X60.

arrival of Croatian political emigration to the country, the last one being the bloodiest one and lasting seven years (1976–83).

After a honeymoon period with the homeland in the 1990s, the disillusionment arrived. With the change of government in 2000, Croatia started its path towards European integration, which also implied cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia by extraditing Croatian nationals accused of war crimes committed during the Homeland War. This was perceived by the émigrés as another attack against Croatian statehood and a sign that the struggle was not over. The disappointment was especially profound regarding the treatment of Bleiburg in Croatia. Croats in Argentina thought that their suffering and their victims would finally be acknowledged. Instead, they got a "mild declaration" of the Croatian Parliament condemning the crimes committed by the totalitarian Communist regime from 1945 until 1990,[65] based on the standpoints of resolution 1481 of the Council of Europe (2006).[66] The lack of acknowledgment in Croatia strengthened an identity of being true Croats and the determination to keep commemorating Bleiburg (and April 10), and exacerbated the new us vs. them dichotomy—between the Croats in the diaspora and the Croats in independent Croatia.

This motivated the diaspora community to keep demanding memory and justice and to maintain the old dates with the traditional rituality. The commemorations start with a Mass, celebrated by a Croatian Franciscan flanked by youth wearing traditional costumes, holding Croatian and Argentinian flags. In front of the altar there is a wreath to be laid later at the monument. The wreath is in the form of the Croatian coat of arms beginning with a white field, as during the NDH era, and they also sing the World War II version of the national anthem.[67] The president and another member of the UACRA usually hold the speech at the Plaza de Mayo. For Bleiburg commemorations, they introduce a long banner saying, "Genocide of the Croatian people." In 2011, the UACRA president Iva Vidić stated that "they [the Croats in Croatia] need to recognize the truth and accept that they have been living a lie. … Croatia is still not psychologically nor politically free because lustration was not carried out and the post-Communists still go unpunished and they minimize the Bleiburg genocide. Therefore, we

65 UACRA president Iva Vidić at the Bleiburg commemoration in 2011.

66 Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of January 25, 2006, on the need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian Communist regimes

67 Instead of "Teci Savo, Dravo teci" (Sava, Drava, keep on flowing), they sing "Dravo, Savo, Drino teci" (Drava, Sava, Drina, keep on flowing), including the Drina River in the anthem.

request a Croatian *Nunca Más*, a real and political punishment."[68] Here again we observe the adoption of local memory practices in Argentina, requesting a *nunca más* report as the one produced by the Argentinian National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas—CONADEP) after the last civil- military dictatorship.

Also, in Argentina there was a push for qualifying massive, forced disappearances of thirty thousand people during the dictatorship as genocide.[69] Second, Argentina is a country of immigrant communities, and the Armenian community is one of the most active and influential ones, which is reflected in the fact that Argentina recognized the Armenian genocide.[70] When the representatives of new memory entrepreneurs were asked to explain why they label Bleiburg as a genocide, or to what other mass killings would they compare it with, they all said the Armenian genocide. One of them even stated that at the UACRA meetings it was stressed that they should look up to the Armenians, although they don't have that many resources.[71] A third reason is endogenous and linked to the community itself. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the anti-Communist framing was no longer relevant or valid, especially with having an independent Croatia. However, since that very independent Croatia does not acknowledge Bleiburg as the diaspora community thinks it should, the new framing provides them with a solid entrenchment: if the victims of the Bleiburg killings were in fact victims of genocide, then they were killed because of their ethnicity, that is because of being Croats, real Croats. This memory is not honest, because it forgets that not only Croats were killed at Bleiburg. However, this reframing enabled the second and the third generations to preserve their identity as the descendants of the "real Croats" and the guardians of the Bleiburg memory.

The seventieth anniversary of Bleiburg in 2015 was given special attention by the organizers under the slogan, "Memory and justice for 300,000 killed Croats." First, in the city center a documentary, *The Way of the Cross, a Crime Without Punishment*, by Miljenko Manjkas, was shown with Spanish

68 "Bleiburg—Conmemoración en Buenos Aires," *Studia Croatica*, April 23, 2011, accessed June 29, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4fDJFHWnVI.

69 Daniel Feierstein, "El carácter genocida del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional," *Revista Páginas*, no. 1 (2008): 149–64.

70 Law 26.199 declaration of April 24 "The Day of Action for Tolerance and Respect Among Peoples" in commemoration of the genocide suffered by the Armenian people, adopted on January 11, 2007, https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/ley-26199-124099/texto.

71 Separate interviews with A.S., S.H. and I.V., all members of the second generation, carried out in October 2016.

subtitles for the members of the third and fourth generations who do not understand Croatian sufficiently, "but they still have respect and interest for the suffering of their grandfathers." Next, they marched to the May Pyramid at the Plaza de Mayo where they laid a wreath, read a speech in Spanish, and distributed leaflets. Finally, a Mass was celebrated at the Buenos Aires Cathedral and the Jadran choir sang Croatian songs. They also published the following statement: "In spite of geographic distance and the passage of time, we, Argentinian Croats and their descendants are and wish to be the living part of Croatian nation and to contribute to our homeland within our capacities, especially in the efforts to clarify the historic roots of the Bleiburg tragedy, the cause why we were born in Argentina."[72]

So, the post-memory generation re-signified the Bleiburg memory as the main cause why they were not born in Croatia, their personal trauma. Because of being born in the Croatian community in Argentina, where the Bleiburg memory was shaped and preserved, this enables them to develop a sense of singularity towards the "Homeland" that, according to them, did not give it the treatment it deserves, and to preserve the identity of the guardians of the Bleiburg memory and truth. When asked why they keep commemorating Bleiburg in Argentina, one interviewee responded: "Because 90 percent of us Croats who came to Buenos Aires after World War II have at least one family member who disappeared at Bleiburg. We will keep commemorating Bleiburg until the victims are recognized in Croatia. When the real facts are known, when there will be history and lustration, then the pain will stop. Because we want them to acknowledge what happened at Bleiburg."[73]

Bleiburg does not only serve them as a territorial mark, but as an imaginary topography of an underground memory maintained 12,000 km from the scene of the events. The three or four generations of the Croatian diaspora have never visited the place or participated in the commemorations that have been carried out in Austria since 1952 in a clandestine way and since the mid-1960s in a more formal way, and since the 1990s in an open and formal manner under the (varied) sponsorship of Croatian institutions. What Bleiburg as topography represents to them encompasses much more than that physical field of 30,000 square meters and it would probably disappoint

72 Unión de Asociaciones Croatas de la República Argentina, "Argentinski Hrvati: rasvijetliti događaje oko Bleiburga zbog kojih smo rođeni u Argentini," *Croexpress*, May 16, 2015, accessed June 13, 2025, https://www.croexpress.eu/argentinski-hrvati-rasvijetliti-dogadaje-oko-bleiburga-zbog-kojih-smo-rodeni-u-argentini.

73 Interview with S.H., second generation, October 2016.

them if they visited it. Bleiburg encompasses and means for them the entire tragedy of exile that has lasted for them for almost eighty years. For the first generation it meant defeat and trauma, while symbolizing an oath to return, while for the second and third generations who grew up with the trauma as if they had experienced it personally, it is the reason why they were born in Argentina, being Croatian and maintaining its identity as a community that bears the seal of uniqueness and the incessant search for recognition.

In the same line, the anniversary of April 10 in 2017 was organized, simultaneously marking the seventieth anniversary of their arrival to Argentina. For the occasion, they distributed a brochure titled "1941—April 10—2017—Proclamation of the first independence of the Croatian State in the contemporary era," with the NDH-era coat of arms.[74] The Mass was held at the Ignacio Loyola Church in the city center "in memory of all the Croats who laid their lives for the independence of their Homeland." After that, the congregation walked to the Galería Güemes hall nearby, where a cultural program was held with speeches given by three generations of representatives. The message was the same: "The massive Croatian immigration to Argentina is a direct consequence of the first proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia on 10 April 1941 and its fall in May 1945. If it weren't for the drastic and violent change in Croatia with the arrival of the Yugoslav Serb-Communist regime and Tito's bloody dictatorship, such a large-scale migration would have never occurred. Consequently, we would not be here today."[75] Also, April 10 is "the date marking the first independence of Croatian State … that served as a trigger for the much-awaited independence in 1991 … the Croatian war of independence from 1991 to 1995 and the events surrounding 10 April 1941 are closely related …. 10 April 1941 was a driving engine of the ideas of freedom and sovereignty."[76]

When asked why they keep celebrating April 10, several persons distanced themselves from the NDH, but justified the date itself: "Because, in spite of all the bad things of the NDH, we interpret it as the first cry for freedom of the Croats."[77] "We can discuss what happened later, even on 11 April, but nobody can question that the act itself on 10 April it was a cry for freedom."[78] Therefore, we can observe that the descendants of the Croatian political

74 The event was personally attended by the author of the book.

75 Davorin Porić, the 1.5 generation, speech at the commemoration of April 10, 2017 (personally attended by the author).

76 I.C.J., third generation, speech at the commemoration of April 10, 2017 (personally attended by the author),

77 Interview with S.H., second generation, October 2016.

78 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), the 1.5 generation, on July 31, 2018.

émigrés have become aware of the crimes committed during the NDH era, maybe even by their parents or grandparents, because they make vague allusions to it, but they still downplay it and prioritize the "higher meaning" of the NDH and April 10, because, as Welzer et. al. already showed in their research, the family history clashes with official history and makes the descendants create a coherent narrative by justifying the (mis)deeds of their grandparents and parents.[79]

And then, the meaning of June 25 is included—the date when according to them the dream of sovereign Croatia, the result of April 10, 1941, came true: "The achievement of 10 April is not only due to those who confronted the oppressors of Croatian people with arms, but to all of those who established an idea and the belief that Croatia should be free and sovereign to be happy … This idea was still palpitating, although weakly, throughout all these years after the tragedy of 1945, and it turned into hot coal when the process of the fall of Communism started in Europe."[80] Since it is the "current" Croatian statehood day, they attend the reception organized by the Croatian embassy without giving it special attention themselves. When asked why they give it only mild attention, they answered: "First you [Croats in Croatia] celebrated 30 May as the Statehood Day, and then you changed it into 25 June. Until you agree when your Statehood Day is, we will keep celebrating 10 April as always. Thus, we also treasure the memory of our fathers."[81] They also justify their treatment with how it is treated in Croatia: "Because you don't celebrate June 25 with so much zeal, you celebrate August 5 more,"[82] referring to the Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day and Day of Croatian Defenders, marking Operation Storm (Oluja) in 1995 when the Croatian military retook the city of Knin. In fact, in November 2019, the Croatian parliament decided to change the date of the Croatian statehood day back again to May 30.[83]

Hence, the diaspora "leaves" the celebration of statehood day to the embassy, while they commemorate two events from the Homeland War: August 5, the Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day and the Day of Croatian Defenders, and November 18, the Day of Remembrance of the Victims

79 Harald Welzer et al., *Mi abuelo no era nazi: El nacionalsocialismo y el Holocausto en la memoria familiar* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Prometeo Libros, 2012).

80 Jorge Dragicevic, second generation, speech at the April 10 celebration in 2015, accessed September 3, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/unioncroata2017/posts/787887348051410.

81 Interview with I.V., second generation, October 2016.

82 Interview with S.H., second generation, October 2016.

83 Law on Holidays, Memorial Days and Non-Working Days in the Republic of Croatia, Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 110/2019, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2019_11_110_2212.html.

of Vukovar. In both cases, they celebrate a Mass at the Croatian Catholic Center where they give speeches. In 2017 they organized a celebration of August 5 with typical Croatian cuisine and a cultural program. By the same token, as June 25 is viewed as a result of forty-five years of their struggle, August 5 marks Operation Storm and is practically the end of their armed fight, "a legendary operation of Croatian Army that sealed once and for all the Great-Serbian plans on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Storm is the crown of the Homeland War, the queen of all Croatian victories, a pride for eternity, and a duty to transmit this pride to our children. May all the fallen Croatian fighters of all the times who gave their lives for Croatian Independence and freedom rest in peace. Ready for the Homeland!"[84] On the other hand, Vukovar symbolizes "the resistance to Serbian aggression and the sacrifice of fighting for freedom and independence."[85] At the Vukovar remembrance day they wore banners saying "Vukovar—Never forgive, never forget!" Also, the Homeland War ended, but the fight did not, as another banner reads: "Through the Homeland War to liberation, through lustration to freedom."[86] This means that the fight should never end, because if it ends then they lose their cause and their identity.

The active contribution of the diaspora, either by sending arms to Croatia in the 1990s or even by having directly participated in the war, grants them legitimacy to interpret the Homeland War as a continuation of their struggle for an independent Croatia. And they also have a war hero coming from their lines: Branko Pilsel, known as Pilino to his friends, a war volunteer from Argentina, disappeared in combat near Dubrovnik on October 23, 1991. The speech on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death is very illustrative of the entire memory of the post-memory generation today:

> Branko, as many of us, was born and raised in our community of political exiles forced to emigrate to this blessed land of Argentina, fleeing from the assassin claws of Tito's Yugoslavism that ruthlessly destroyed the emergence of the first contemporary Independent State of Croatia … Our nation-building Croatian community never stopped claiming and fighting (sometimes in complete solitude) for the right of the Croatian people to have its own free and sovereign national state …. When in the

84 Tomislav Frkovic, second generation, speech at the Commemoration of the Operation Storm, August 7, 2016, accessed September 13, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAQ66HcfgMc?; "Za dom, spremni!"—the official salute of the Independent State of Croatia.

85 Leaflet distributed at the Day of Remembrance of the Victim of Vukovar commemoration, November 20, 2016.

86 The event was personally attended by the author of this book.

> early 1990s the Croatian nation, the same way as half a century before, entered into a new war of liberation, together with the rest of Croatian communities dispersed all over the world, we did not hesitate to actively collaborate with all the means at our disposal … Branko gave his biggest contribution, his own life in combat against the enemies of the idea of Croatian independence (Yugoslavism in all its expressions and Great-Serbian imperialism) …. For all of us who consider that Croatia can be lived without living in Croatia, the memory of Pilino and all of those who gave their lives for the Homeland, apart from being a source of pride and gratitude, represents a permanent call to our own patriotism … and should inspire us to continue the political and cultural fight that lays ahead, after decades of suffering submission to the triple Yugoslav-Marxist-Great-Serbian tyranny … Glory to our Croatian-Argentine fighter Branko Pilsel and glory to all the fallen fighters for Croatian freedom of all times! Long live the free Croatian State![87]

Branko Pilsel is the symbol of their patriotism and the call to continue with the fight for the recognition of their contribution to the fight for Croatian independence, whether in the 1990s or in the 1940s, described romantically as "the fallen fighters for Croatian freedom." In fact, while we could hear critical voices by the first generation of political émigrés in Argentina, the witnesses of World War II, the further we go in time and across generations, the more idealized and detached from reality is the version of their descendants on the role and the nature of the NDH regime and their own ancestors.

87 Tomislav Frkovic, second generation, speech during the Mass at the Croatian Catholic Center St. Nikola Tavelić, Buenos Aires, October 23, 2016 (personally attended by the author).

6. The 1990s: Between a Dream Come True and Dejá Vu

Abstract: This chapter analyzes the resignification of the community memory of the Croatian diaspora after Croatia became independent. It covers the period of the 1990s and the lobbying for Croatian recognition by the Argentine Republic, the purchasing and smuggling arms to Croatia, the war hero who died in the Homeland War, Branko Pilsel, and the Argentinean-born Croats who returned to Croatia. It also treats the declassification of files on the arrival of Nazis in Argentina and the subsequent cases of extradition requests of Ustaša officials Dinko Šakić and Ivo Rojnica. Finally, the chapter treats the politics of re-Croatization of the earlier waves of Croatian immigrants to Argentina who considered themselves Yugoslavs, Italians, or Austrians.

Keywords: Croatian independence, 1990s, return, extradition requests, re-Croatization

When Croatia became independent in the 1990s, it was a very emotional moment for the émigrés, especially members of the first generation and the 1.5 generation, whose members I interviewed. One member of the 1.5 generation said: "It was a moment of euphoria, we could not believe that that was happening, and then I remembered that I was telling my father that it wasn't possible, and I started to cry, because he didn't live long enough to see it. So, I regret having doubted his dream that Croatia was going to be independent again."[1] Another was also sorry that his father "died a year before the *new* independence of Croatia. He did not know that his wish came true."[2] For another from the same group, "it was a vindication. That the fight of my family and all that we have suffered

1 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), July 30, 2018.

2 Antonio Vrancic, *Marcapasos* (Buenos Aires: Dunken, 2018), 46.

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-7

was not in vain. That we, the Croats, partly Ustaša and my family, returned to history again, before we were excluded from history, we were *condemnatio victi*."[3] Another, who was born in 1945, said: "I got back my country, my identity. I was something. I belong to something again, I have a country, a Nation. Before, Croatia was only a Yugoslav province and nothing else. My parents suffered their whole lives because of that, and my husband always said that he was proud of being born in a free and sovereign Croatia."[4]

For the Croatian post-World War II political emigration (in Argentina), the independence of the Republic of Croatia meant the continuation of their struggle in World War II and during the Cold War:

> if we had not declared our own state in 1941 … there would not have been a historical experience that could clearly show, not only to the world but to ourselves in the first place, that Croats want an independent state and that they will use absolutely every opportunity to establish it. The generations of today would not have known that Croats can establish their state, and in 1990 and 1991 they would only have had an idea of autonomy and not of a sovereign state … without 10 Apr and without the historical experience and the example of the Independent State of Croatia, today we would not have an independent Republic of Croatia.[5]

In the 1990s, their narrative gained revival in the newly independent Republic of Croatia, strengthened by a significant influx of the diaspora returnees to the country who actively supported the nationalist movement led by the HDZ. Seen from the homeland, this diaspora switched "from dormant to mobilized entities,"[6] but in their view they had been guardians of Croatian freedom for forty-five years.

The HDZ leader and the first president of Croatia Franjo Tuđman (1990–99) founded his political project on the reconciliation between the descendants of the Ustaša/fascists and Partisans/antifascists, and the unity between the homeland and émigré Croatia. An early version of the idea of national reconciliation can be traced to Vjekoslav Maks Luburić's "Message of Reconciliation of Croatian National Resistance with Croatian Communists,"

3 Interview with S.E.K. (born in 1942), November 14, 2017.

4 Interview with Š.N. (born in 1945), August 11, 2018.

5 Kazimir Katalinić, "10 de abril de 1941," *Studia Croatica*, no. 131, August 1996.

6 Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad.* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21.

with which Tuđman was familiar.[7] His idea of reconciliation by "forgetting the past" backfired and he unintentionally tolerated the rehabilitation of the Ustaša.[8] He also drew from Bruno Bušić's ideas on "the stigmatization of the Croatian Ustaša as fascists and the undermining of the evaluation of the activities of Croatian communists as a pursuit of sovereignty."[9] In his August 1990 speech in the parliament, Tuđman stated that "the radical right public excesses cannot be banned, due to the democracy that we have … However, we do not approve of such tendencies, and would never allow it to become a part of the official politics."[10]

At the same time, in the 1990s the potential of the diaspora-homeland relations materialized. In Latin America, the HDZ founded various branches: in 1990, four branches in Argentina (Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza, and Bariloche), four in Venezuela, one in Peru, one in Brazil in 1991, and one in Uruguay in 1991. This went hand in hand with frequent visits and exchanges between homeland politicians and the diaspora, with its culmination in December 1994 when Franjo Tuđman visited Argentina. The first visit was made by Gojko Šušak on November 21, 1990, then minister for emigration of the Republic of Croatia in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and San Carlos de Bariloche, "to make contact with the numerous Croatian institutions to promote and strengthen cultural, economic, and professional relations, and to establish relations with local authorities to explain to them the profound political changes produced in the course of this year in Croatia and Slovenia and in Yugoslavia in general."[11] He also went to Chile, Peru, and Venezuela. On the occasion of his visit to Argentina, Šušak gave a statement to the local newspaper *El Cronista Comercial*, explaining the reasons for his official visit due to the very important Croatian community abroad (three million people), even in Argentina. He also stated: "We are trying to ensure that their experience, their knowledge and their economic capacity can be

7 Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, "Poruka izmirenja H.N.Odpora s hrvatskim komunistima" [Message of reconciliation of Croatian National Resistance with Croatian communists], *Drina* (1964): 18–21.

8 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Flirting with Fascism: The Ustaša legacy and Croatian Politics in the 1990s," in *The Shared History and the Second World War and National Question in Ex-Yugoslavia* (Novi Sad: CHDR, 2008).

9 Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk, "The Idea of National Reconciliation and the Croatian Memory of the Past," *Slavic Memory* (2017): 68. Bušić was a prominent émigré and anti-communist activist, killed by the Yugoslav secret service in Paris in 1978.

10 Stevo Đurašković, "National Identity-Building and the 'Ustaša-Nostalgia' in Croatia: The Past That Will Not Pass," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 5 (2016): 772–88.

11 "El ministro croata Gojko Šušak visita la Argentina," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXI, July–December 1990, Vol. 118–119, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/118/118.htm#_Toc269127765.

used to help Croatia. But we do not ask them to return if they do not want to, but rather that they collaborate and help. And we also want them to ask the Western world to support the independence and freedom of Croatia."[12] This was not Šušak's only visit to Argentina and Chile, but it was the only official one. Already minister of defense, he visited the region twice incognito in September 1991 "for special reasons" (arms purchase, see further in the chapter).[13] Croatian minister of foreign affairs Mate Granić also visited Argentina in 1991, and he was received by his Argentinian counterpart Guido Di Tella, asking for a quick recognition of Croatia, since "every day of delaying this decision means allowing a Serbian Holocaust against my people," alluding to an extermination of Croats by Serbia.[14]

In June 1991, Franjo Tuđman appointed Ivo Rojnica as the representative of the Republic of Croatia in Argentina, and he soon opened an office of the Republic of Croatia. The building of the office that later became the Croatian embassy was and still is owned by Hrvatski dom d.d. In the 1990s it was rented to the Republic of Croatia for a symbolic 1 USD. The first employees of the office were Slavko Eugen Kvaternik (university professor of political science, and son of Eugen Dido Kvaternik, Ustaša general lieutenant and chief of the internal security service of the Independent State of Croatia), Maja Lukač Stier (university professor, and mother of Davor Ivo Stier—see below in the text), Ante Stier (son of Ivan Stier, NDH colonel of the Ustaša Militia, and father of Davor Ivo Stier—see below in the text), Domagoj Ante Petrić (who at that time worked at the presidency of the Argentinian Republic, and was the son of Ivan Petrić, the first NDH minister of health), Franjo Blažević (later Croatian ambassador to Chile in the 1990s), and Jorge Francetić (nephew of the Ustaša general Jure Francetić, NDH era commander of the notorious Black Legion, and son of Nikola Francetić, head of Pavelić's security guard).

Their activities were mainly oriented towards the recognition of Croatian independence. The office of the Republic of Croatia in Buenos Aires lobbied for the recognition of Croatia by Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.[15] Also, the UACRA (the umbrella organization

12 "Si no hay confederación, no existe más Yugoslavia", *Studia Croatica* Year XXXI July – December 1990, Vol. 118-119 http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/118/118.htm#_Toc269127765

13 Frane Krnić, *Crni kaput, bijele rukavice. Zapisi jednog diplomata* (Zagreb: Naklada Bošković, 2021), 53.

14 Daniel Santoro, *Venta de armas, hombres del gobierno. El escándalo de la venta ilegal de armas argentinas a Ecuador, Croacia y Bosnia* (Buenos Aires: Planeta- Espejo de la Argentina, 1998), 148.

15 Ivan Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005), 461.

of Croatian associations in Argentina) led by Jasna Müller de Terrazas organized gatherings every Friday in front of the congress with speeches by Croatian and foreign personalities.[16] "Every Friday Croatian women would dress up as if they were going to a ball and go to the Congress. Croatian liberation [the 1991 declaration of independence] was like a *dejá vu*, like in the times of the Independent State of Croatia, they felt young and free again," a member of the second generation said.[17] As a result, on January 16, 1992, Argentina was the first Latin American country to recognize Croatia. On the day of signing this resolution, President Menem invited leaders of the Croatian community to his residence in Olivos and made the announcement himself.[18]

Rojnica never became ambassador, as planned, due to accusations by the Simon Wiesenthal Center for war crimes committed in the role of Ustaša military governor of Dubrovnik in World War II (see further in the text).[19] He decided to withdraw after an unofficial visit by the then vice minister of foreign affairs Ivo Sanader, who traveled privately to Argentina to negotiate with the Croatian community. Rojnica was a close friend of the president, Carlos Saúl Menem, who even requested an exception for Rojnica, a dual Croatian and Argentinian citizen, from the Argentinian Law on Citizenship for Rojnica to become Croatian ambassador to Argentina. According to *Página 12*, another controversy arose from the alleged involvement of Rojnica (and Petrić) in sending Argentine mercenaries to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[20] However, in 1994, on the occasion of Tuđman's official visit to Argentina, he was awarded the Order of Duke Trpimir with a collar for excellence in "promoting Croatia in the Argentinian Republic, and especially for his activities in connecting political, cultural and civilizational values of the Croatian people in the period after World War II."[21]

The office held numerous formal and informal meetings with President Menem, with leaders of parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties, journalists, and ambassadors. Argentinian senator Bravo Herrera, member of the congressional defense committee, visited Croatia and war fronts in 1991, accompanied by Rojnica and Domagoj Ante Petrić, who through his work within both the Argentinian ministry of defense and Croatian embassy, "contributed to the positive attitude of Argentinian Peace Corps

16 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 461.
17 Interview with I.V., second generation, October 2016.
18 Santoro, *Venta de armas*, 148.
19 Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 176.
20 "Croacia sin embajador," *Página 12*, June 29, 1993.
21 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 93/1994, December 16, 1994.

(within the UN) in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina."[22] In Zagreb, Bravo Herrera was received by President Franjo Tuđman, the parliament speaker Žarko Domljan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zvonimir Šeparović, Minister of Defense Gojko Šušak, and Mayor of Zagreb Boris Buzančić. During his visit, Bravo Herrera expressed his astonishment by the UN embargo on the import of weapons, saying: "How is it possible to establish an arms embargo against an attacked nation that does not have sufficient means for its defense, instead of applying it against the invader, the Yugoslav army, one of the strongest in Europe?"[23] By that time, Argentina had already dispatched a first shipment of arms to Croatia and the Croatian diaspora in Argentina was undoubtedly involved.

At the beginning of 1991, Alberto Daniel Barrenchea, an Argentinian intermediary, met in South Africa "with a Croat that spoke Italian, interested in buying weapons for his country."[24] The plan was to create a shell company in order to not involve the Directorate General for Military Supplies (Dirección General de Fabricaciones Militares—DGFM) and to cover up for the imminent UN arms embargo imposed on Croatia. They decided to create a company in Uruguay (at that time there were seventy-five thousand shell companies in Uruguay owned by Argentinians created to evade taxes or do illegal operations) and sell arms to a company in Panama that was going to figure in the papers, while Panama since the US invasion in 1989 had no army, but only police. On August 27, Menem signed a secret decree selling arms to Panama for 15,878,500 USD.[25]

On September 20, 1991, the first shipment was loaded on the ship *Opatija* owned by Croatia Line supposedly going to Cristóbal, Panama, for 4.4 million USD. It bore a forged signature of the chargé d'affaires of the Panamanian embassy in Buenos Aires. Five days later, on September 25, 1991, the United Nations Security Council, at the time when Argentina was a non-permanent member, adopted resolution 713 and decided to "immediately implement a general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia."[26]

A second shipment was sent in accordance with secret decree no. 2283 on October 31, 1991, "to the security and police forces in Panama" in the value of

22 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 461.

23 "Senador argentino en visita oficial a Croacia," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXII, July–December 1991, Vol. 121, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/121/121.htm#_Toc269146038.

24 Santoro, *Venta de armas*, 133.

25 Santoro, *Venta de armas*, 133–63.

26 Resolution 713 (1991) of September 25, 1991, Socialist Federal Rep. of Yugoslavia (25 Sept) http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/713.

twenty-nine million USD. In the meantime, in Croatia, Argentinian weapons were already being used, and this complicated the situation for Argentinian troops on the ground. For instance, Serbian soldiers showed Argentinian Blue Helmets Argentinian arms seized from Croats, and an article was published in August 1992 in a US mercenaries' journal *Soldier of Fortune* interviewing Croatian soldiers who praised the quality of Argentinian FAL guns.[27]

There was an attempt of a third shipment through a fake contract with Bolivia for fifty-one million USD, although Bolivia was insolvent and already owed money for arms purchase to Argentina. The plan failed because the incumbent president Jaime Paz Zamora lost elections to the liberal Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada. He started asking for explanations, first because Bolivia did not have that money, and second because they already bought arms from China for four million USD.

In April 1994, Croatian minister of foreign affairs Mate Granić visited Argentina and met with Menem. On that occasion he expressed his gratitude to Argentina publicly, "for its contribution to the Blue Helmets UN contingent and because it was one of the first countries to recognize our independence."[28] This resulted in an international arms trafficking scandal and even President Menem was tried before Argentinian courts for shipping 6.5 tons of weapons to Croatia (and Ecuador) valued at around thirty-three million USD. The investigation started already in 1995, but the final sentence was not delivered until 2018 when all the accused were acquitted for procedural reasons. Particularly problematic was that Argentina had eight hundred troops deployed within the UN contingent at the time.[29] This was also an argument for the Bosnian Serbs to object to the transfer of Argentinian Battalion BEA VIII in the UN peacekeeping mission in Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina on the grounds of being pro-Croat.[30]

This was not the only attempt by Croatia to buy arms from the region. When Croatian parliament speaker Žarko Domljan visited Chile from December 9 to 11, 1991, he was supposed to be received by the Chilean president Patricio Aylwin, but the visit was canceled at the last minute because on that day at the Budapest airport Hungarian police seized an airplane of Chilean arms on its way to Croatia.[31] As the then Croatian ambassador to Chile, Frane Krnić stresses in his memoirs, "the Chilean

27 Santoro, *Venta de armas*, 152.

28 Santoro, *Venta de armas*, 149.

29 "Reúnen datos sobre tres envíos de armas argentinas a Croacia," *Clarín*, April 6, 1995.

30 Jorge Pedro Barceló, "Argentina se va de Croacia rechazada por los serbios," *Ámbito*, June 21, 1995.

31 Krnić, *Crni kaput, bijele rukavice*, 53.

arms scandal is still an intriguing topic. Twenty years later two high Chilean military officials were sentenced to prison for the killing of Gerardo Huber who was willing to reveal the paths of Chilean arms sales to Croatia to the Chilean investigators in charge of the official inquiry."[32] Colonel Gerardo Huber Olivares was a member of the Chilean intelligence service DINA who was disappeared and killed in February 1992 after giving testimony on arms deal with Croatia.[33]

The Return

The independence of Croatia also meant the return of those who were born in the country or their children and grandchildren who in their view were born in Argentina due to historical circumstances but considered Croatia their true homeland. For many it was the first time they got a passport, because they had been stateless until then. For all, it was a very emotional moment. When the members of the 1.5 generation traveled to Croatia, some reconstructed their childhood memories from the 1940s: "I had low blood pressure when I was a child, so I had to stop and bow my head on my way to school. I always did that at the same place. Whenever I go to Zagreb, I stop at that place."[34] A man who was born in 1938 said that he "had not been home for sixty years."[35] Others accompanied their parents: "My dad has not been in Croatia for fifty years. When he said goodbye to his cousin again in 1997, the farewell was so sad. They were very old then."[36] Another had a very emotional get-together with his nanny, who had been like a mother to him, finding her house full of his photos.[37] One woman who was born in 1945 was proud because "Nobody believed that I was not from Croatia judging from my accent."[38]

These were also times of historical reparations for some of the exiles. The NDH era Zagreb University rector Stjepan Horvat, who died in 1985, took the rector's chain with him into exile and deposited it with the Croatian Pontifical College of Saint Jerome in Rome. The chain was brought back to

32 Krnić, *Crni kaput, bijele rukavice*, 53

33 "Chile officers jailed for murder," BBC, October 6, 2009, accessed June 27, 2025, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8292257.stm.

34 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), July 30, 2018.

35 A.V. (born in 1938).

36 Interview with M.S. (born in 1942), November 27, 2017.

37 Interview with M.P. (born in 1940), August 27, 2018.

38 Interview with Š.N. (born in 1945), August 11, 2018.

Zagreb University in 1991.[39] Horvat was rehabilitated on November 3, 1994, and his portrait was put among other rectors in the rector's office.[40]

Some also returned to stay. From 1990 to 1998, around five thousand families returned to Croatia from all six continents, "bringing around today's 175 million €, added to the 150 million € that the diaspora sent to their family members. Also, a monthly influx of pensions from abroad in 1995 amounted to 10 million €, and in 1998, 150 million €. According to the data from Croatian National Bank, during the war Croatian émigrés invested 151 million USD through the Croatian Privatization Fund. At the same time, an estimated amount of total private investment is between 500 million and 1 billion German marks."[41] They also donated to the then Croatian Credit Bank for Reconstruction for the return of internally displaced persons after the Homeland War. As then Prime Minister Nikica Valentić stated, "from the first day of the sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia, emigrated Croatians settled in all countries of the world, demonstrated their unconditional and deep loyalty to Croatia, expressing it through the political, moral, financial, humanitarian and aid of all kinds. It was channeled to the Homeland during the war and continues in the period of reconstruction of cities and villages and protection for those who lost their homes. Through maintaining close ties with Croatia, Croats residing abroad are an inseparable part of their Homeland, without distinction arising from the reasons that led them to leave the country."[42]

The returnees also transferred their political parties, such as the Croatian Republican Union (Hrvatska republikanska zajednica) and the Croatian Liberation Movement (Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret), originally founded in Argentina in 1951 and 1956, respectively. The HOP was eventually diluted within the Croatian Party of Rights, while the HRZ later joined the HRAST coalition of extreme right parties that later in 2010s joined an extreme-rightist coalition called Croatian Sovereigntists (Hrvatski suverenisti) and eventually the Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret), which will be treated in the next chapter.[43]

39 Stjepan Horvat, University of Zagreb, https://hosting.unizg.hr/rektori/shorvat.htm.

40 Stjepan Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice. Razmatranja o suvremenoj hrvatskoj problematici iz perspektive izbjegličkog logora* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2022), 16.

41 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 464–65.

42 "Recuperación económica de Croacia – participación de la diáspora croata en la reconstrucción de Croacia," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXV, April–June 1994, Vol. 125, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/125/125.htm#_Toc269234251.

43 "Hrvatskim suverenistima pridružile se još tri desne stranke: 'Ovo je gruda koja će se pretvoriti u lavinu,'" *Tportal*, October 2, 2021, https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/hrvatskim-suverenistima-pridruzile-se-jos-tri-desne-stranke-ovo-je-gruda-koja-ce-se-pretvoriti-u-lavinu-20211002.

Up to 20 percent of the Croatian ministry of foreign affairs staff in the 1990s came from the diaspora "because of their knowledge of foreign languages,"[44] while many prominent members carried out important official positions. Among others, Gojko Šušak (Canada) was the minister of defense (1991–98), Zdravko Sančević (Venezuela) was the minister of diaspora and later ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zdravka Bušić (USA) was the chief of cabinet for President Tuđman, Julienne Bušić (US) worked at the cabinet of the president, Vinko Nikolić (Argentina, Spain) was a member of the committee of the Croatian Heritage Foundation, Domagoj Ante Petrić (Argentina) was assistant minister of return and emigration, and Marin Sopta (Canada) was the secretary of the HDZ for emigration.[45] Neda Rosandić Šarić, daughter of one of the Kavran group members, was appointed Croatian ambassador to Argentina from 1995 to 2000, Franjo Antun Blažević, a Croat from Argentina, was appointed ambassador to Chile from 1995 to 1998, and Zdravko Sančević, after his ministerial position was appointed Croatian ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. Later he went back to Venezuela in 1999 where he was the Honorary Consul of Croatia until he died.

In 1994 a Society for Returned Croatian Emigrants was founded to help returning emigrants face administrative difficulties in Croatia in the premises of the Croatian Heritage Foundation, gathering Croatian returnees from Switzerland, Germany, Australia, and the United States. The society already had about forty members and about two or three thousand Croatians had returned from emigration to Croatia and were facing similar problems. Their common interest and goal were clearly stated: "We are a group of people with a common interest: we are all citizens of Croatia, but all of us have lived in the West and now we want to integrate into Croatian society … After many years abroad and living with the desire to return to our homeland, we are now impatient with the colossal and slow bureaucracy." According to a report from *Studia Croatica*, they felt disenchanted, "most likely due to the way they idealized Croatia while living abroad." Ivan Milas emphasized that Croatia must make its tax and social systems more like those of the West. "We have not gathered because we want privileges, we simply want to transmit our experiences to Croatia," he added, explaining

44 Čizmić et al., *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 464.

45 Zdravka Bušić is the sister of Zvonko Bušić, Croatian émigré who in 1976 hijacked an airplane in New York to draw attention to Croatia's independence and served thirty-two years in prison. During her émigré years in Cleveland, she closely collaborated with the Croatian National Resistance founded by Vjekoslav Maks Luburić. Zvonko Bušić's wife Julienne Bušić participated in the same hijacking action and was sentenced to life in prison but was released in 1989.

the basic wishes of the returnees, who have helped their homeland both morally and financially. Without them, it is unlikely that we would have an independent Croatia today, emphasized Ivić Pašalić, representing President Tuđman. Other participants suggested that some type of reception center should be built for those returnees (and students) who had nowhere to be while they relocated.[46]

They grew up being told that Croatia was like in a fairytale, but they returned to a "Cold Homeland."[47] When they started settling, they also experienced multiple cultural shocks, they felt lonely due to cultural differences, and their integration "in the homeland" was not easy. And a reverse phenomenon occurred—after settling in Croatia, they started to preserve the Spanish language and traditions from Argentina, as well as commemorate Argentinian dates.[48] A group of the eldest ones who became widows sold their belongings in Argentina and settled in two nurseries in Zagreb. They socialize among themselves and occasionally get visits from their children who come to Croatia. The first generation mostly stayed in Argentina because they did not want to live far away from their children and grandchildren.[49]

There was an idea of fostering the return of the diaspora after the Military- Police Operation Storm, carried out by Croatian troops in 1995, that liberated the Serb-occupied territories of Knin and surroundings, when the areas were depopulated because of the massive expulsion of the civilian Serb population (estimated at 150,000–200,000 people). According to the transcript from the files of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, on August 22, 1995, a meeting was held in the president's office between Tuđman and Jure Radić, then minister of reconstruction and development. After Radić complained to him that he could not convince resident Croats to settle in Serbian villages because they were afraid "that a Serb would come back tomorrow," Tuđman stated that they should invite exiles to come back, "pay for their trips from Argentina, Australia, etc.,

46 "Sociedad para los emigrantes croatas retornados," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXV, April–June 1994, Vol. 125, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/125/125.htm#_Toc269234252.

47 The term is borrowed from Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der Deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2008).

48 Valentina Gulin Zrnić, "Nikad 'nikad,' nikad 'zauvijek': Hrvatsko-argentinska priča Miriam Ane Tadić Blažević," in *Didov san. Transgranična iskustva hrvatskih iseljenika*, ed. Jasna Čapo et al. (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2014), 133–46.

49 Marijeta Rajković-Iveta, "Čuo si da je Hrvatska kao raj! Između mašte i stvarnog života, Hrvati iz Argentine u Zagrebu," in *Didov san: transgranična iskustva hrvatskih iseljenika*, ed. Jasna Čapo et al. (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2014), 195–220.

and give them houses and land." Tuđman continued: "That would mean a thousand people, and they would enter the Serb houses etc." Tuđman said at the meeting, "Immediately go to bring a thousand people with these charters, ships, let's say the state pays them from Argentina, Gojko [Šušak] told me that forty families were in Paraguay, bring them immediately … for sure we can immediately bring at least a thousand people from Chile, Argentina to Australia." Tuđman concluded: "We have to return 1,000 people this year, until next year 200,000, 300,000 people. In that case, from the political point of view, we solved the problem."[50]

When the war started, around one hundred Croats came only from New York to "defend the homeland." From Argentina it was a small a group of soldiers that the Yugoslav People's Army killed in October 1991 near Dubrovnik.[51] One of them was Branko Pilsel, member of the second generation of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina, who died at twenty-three. Every year a Mass in his honor is given on the anniversary of his death with commemorative speeches. In 1997, at the Croatian Catholic Center in Buenos Aires, after the Sunday Mass, his mother Erika Pavlinec received two decorations from the ambassador on behalf of the Croatian state, who expressed well-deserved tribute to Branko's mother. In 1998, *Studia Croatica* transmitted the speech given by one of his friends, stating that he enlisted voluntarily "among many young people who felt that the tragic hours their Homeland was experiencing due to the aggression of the Serbian army and the Serbian paramilitary formations." The speech continues describing Branko as a son of Croatian parents

> without ever having been to Croatia, at 23 years old and with practically no military experience, decided to go fight. … thank you Branko, for having gone to defend the homeland of your elders, our Croatia; thank you Branko, because you were the only Argentine of Croatian origin who went from Argentina to the battlefield; thanks to your mother, and with her to all the Croatian mothers who educated and taught their children to love their Homeland … May God help to keep Branko Pilsel alive in

50 The Unified Court Records (UCR) database—public court records of the ICTY, Case No. IT-06-90-T, P463 (Presidential transcript), August 22, 1995, page 1019–20 (also, a version of the same document in Croatian was used) https://ucr.irmct.org/Search/PreviewPage/?link=http%253A//icr.icty.org/LegalRef/CMSDocStore/Public/English/Judgement/NotIndexable/IT-06-90/JUD229R0000333164.pdf.

51 Ministry of War Veterans of the Republic of Croatia, "Book of Missing Persons on the Territory of the Republic of Croatia," https://branitelji.gov.hr/userdocsimages/arhiva/pdf/Knjiga.nestalih-pdf.pdf.

> the memory of all of us who proudly feel joy for a Croatia, finally free and sovereign, and who consider ourselves part of it despite the enormous geographical distance. Eternal glory to Branko Pilsel![52]

Croatia's kin-state policies paid particular attention to the diaspora. "One of the first resolutions of the Croatian democratic Parliament (Sabor) elected in the free and multi-party elections of April and established on May 30, 1990, when the one-party communist government was overthrown, was to establish the Ministry for Croatian Emigration. The intention was to establish direct contact with the numerous Croatian emigration spread around the world."[53] Koska provided a list of the policies. Article 10 of the constitution institutionalized special obligations of the Croatian state towards its co-ethnics abroad to provide special care and support for the members of Croatian people residing outside the Croatian territory regardless of their citizenship status. The law on Croatian citizenship allowed for dual citizenship based on the ethnic criteria to make up for the historical injustice to the descendants of the émigrés (art. 11 and 16). The creation of the ministry of the diaspora, and the ministry of emigration and return was also important, as was assigning members from the diaspora to important official positions. Especially relevant was the electoral law of 1995, and the twelve diaspora parliamentary seats—10 percent of the total number of MPs, "as a tool for reparations for the diaspora's historical sufferings for the Croatian cause in the past, including the diaspora's contributions to the national economy, the emigration's affiliate interests with Croatian politics and the diaspora's contributions to state independence during the Homeland War."[54] According to *The Economist*, "Fiercely nationalist exiles forked out at least $4m for the 1990 election campaign of Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's arch-nationalist president, and in return were awarded representation in Parliament in 1992, by which time the country had won its independence. Twelve out of the 120 seats were allotted to diaspora Croats, who cast their votes in consulates abroad, or in community centers, clubs and churches designated by the authorities in Zagreb. By contrast, only seven seats were set aside for Croatia's ethnic minorities."[55]

52 Neven Zivkovic, "Branko Pilsel," *Studia Croatica*, Año XXXIX, Buenos Aires, No. 136, February 1998, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/136/136.htm#_Toc269891903.

53 "El ministro croata Gojko Šušak visita la Argentina," *Studia Croatica*, Año XXXI July—December 1990, Vol. 118–19, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/118/118.htm#_Toc269127765.

54 Viktor Koska, "The Development of Kin-State Policies and the Croatian Citizenship Regime," *Minority Studies*, 16 (2013): 218 and 222.

55 "A world of exiles," *The Economist*, January 2, 2003.

The merits of the diaspora were additionally confirmed with medals and decorations awarded by President Tuđman to the distinguished diaspora members when he visited Buenos Aires in 1994. The proposal list of meritorious Croats was made by Ivo Rojnica by request of the newly appointed Ambassador Matko Medo, who in return proposed Rojnica for decoration.[56] Apart from Rojnica, Tuđman awarded the Order of the Croatian Morning Star (Red Danice Hrvatske) to two women who came to Argentina when they were young, and were later active in the Croatian émigré organizations in the field of charity and education: Marija Žubrinić, "for promoting the reputation of the Republic of Croatia in the Argentine Republic and for years-long selfless humanitarian activities during the Homeland War,"[57] and Mada Hunjet Hubmayer "for the promotion of Croatia in Argentina."[58] He also awarded twenty-four members of the Croatian community a mention "for their contribution in spreading the truth about the Republic of Croatia in the Argentine Republic during the Homeland War, for longtime cultural and educational activities in promoting the reputation of the Croatian people in the world."[59] Among those mentioned were the editors of *Hrvatska revija* Radovan Latković and Milan Blažeković, the editor of *Hrvatska Misao* Marko Sinovčić, the World War II NDH military judge and president of the Croatian Republican Party from 1968 to 1991 Ivo Korsky, and Ivan Stier, NDH colonel of the Ustaša Militia. In 1996 Latković, Blažeković, Korsky, Sinovčić, and

56 Embassy of the Republic of Croatia to the Argentine Republic, Proposal for decoration of the Republic of Croatia, July 21, 1994, Fund 1741—Archives of the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman.

57 Official Gazette No. 93/1994 (16 Dec 1994).Žubrinić was the daughter of Drago Žubrinić, Ustaša military commander of Vinodol and Podgorje and from October 1943 governor of the Province of Vinodol and Podgorje. In Argentina he was a member of the HOP council and president of Croatian House. Zdravko Dizdar et al., eds., *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 436–37. Marija Žubrinić herself was very active in the Croatian Home Guard Youth.

58 Official Gazette No. 93/1994 (16 Dec 1994). Hubmayer worked at the Caritas Croatia, Cardinal Stepinac for thirty-five years since its foundation in 1965 (Carmen Verlichak, *Los croatas de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Krivodol Press, 2004), 131). When she died in 2001, *Studia Croatica* published a necrology stating that she was raised in "that tragic Gospić, where everything that was Croatian had to disappear. The youth filled the jails, and the people mourned their innumerable victims. The fighting spirit of young Mada naturally joined those ranks and participated in the fight for the freedom of her people with all the fervor of her soul" (Anera Rukavina, "Mada Hunjet Hubmayer," *Studia Croatica*, Buenos Aires, Year XLII, No. 143, May 2001). Her sister Đurđica Hunjet was the commander of the Ustaša female heroes in the command of the Ustaša youth. Her brother-in-law Danijel Crljen was Ustaša colonel, member of the delegation at the (failed) negotiation of surrender of the NDH army and civilians with the Allies at the Bleiburg field on May 14 and 15, 1945. Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 72–73.

59 Official Gazette No. 93/1994 (16 Dec 1994).

Stier were also awarded the Order of the Croatian Interlace (Red hrvatskog pletera) for their special contribution to the development and reputation of the Republic of Croatia and the benefit of its people, among 754 persons.[60]

This first phase also marked the beginning of systematic maintenance of institutional relations through opening embassies and Croatian language courses abroad and the Croatian language studies for foreigners (mostly coming from the diaspora) at the University of Zagreb.

The Croatian political émigré community after World War II was not the only target of kin-state policies. The diplomatic representations also had a task to attract the Croatian emigration from the earlier waves—those who declared themselves as *austríacos* (Austrians, in fact Austro-Hungarians), *italianos* (Italians), or *yugoslavos* (Yugoslavs), depending on the time and passport with which they entered Argentina. Just as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia tried to "make Yugoslavs" in the diaspora (and at home)—who were later taken over by Socialist Yugoslavia with effort from the Yugoslav embassy in Buenos Aires to foster Yugoslav identity and loyalty to the country—Croatia invested in the opposite goal. According to the information on the Croatian diaspora in Argentina of the ministry of foreign affairs of the Republic of Croatia sent to the office of the president in 1994, Croats in Argentina were divided into Croats and Yugoslavs, Croats being "the post-war political émigré community that managed to escape from Bleiburg," and Yugoslavs "the 'old emigration' that emigrated before the process of modern Croatian national integration had finished." The report stressed the necessity of "reconciliation between the 'old' and the 'new' emigration, as well as the formation of a policy of re-Croatization of *rekroatizacija* (re-Croatization)."[61] The process of *rekroatizacija* went more smoothly in other Latin American countries such as Chile were there was practically no post-World War II political emigration; in Argentina it encountered a lot of problems. Because at first the office of the Republic of Croatia was headed by Ivo Rojnica, a political émigré himself, and all the employees of the embassy were members of émigré community, they did not consider the earlier waves to be Croatian. When Rojnica went to Chile in September 1991 as the plenipotentiary of the Croatian government for Argentina and South America, he sent a letter to the president of "Yugoslav Stadium" Jorge Razmilic in Chile that he would visit the community in Santiago only when "Yugoslav associations adopt

60 Official Gazette No. 56/1996 (11 Jun 1996).

61 Information on the relations and cooperation between the Republic of Croatia and the Argentine Republic, November 1994, HR–HDA–1741, Croatian State Archives—Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman.

Croatian names."[62] Therefore, while the process of re-Croatization of the diaspora in Chile started already in 1991 with professional diplomats in charge of the embassy, in Argentina it was not until 1994 when Mato Medo was appointed ambassador from Croatia. However, he was soon replaced by Neda Rosandić Šarić in November 1995, again coming from the political émigré community, so the process was more difficult. Even though the former Yugoslav associations realized that they were mostly Croats and turned into Croatian associations in the 1990s, well into the 2000s there was still a gap between the political émigré community and the earlier waves of Croatian immigrants in Argentina, because they did not consider them "real Croats," and because from their arrival after World War II they did not have good relations since the others were financed by the Yugoslav embassy and promoted Yugoslavia, considered the enemy.

The general attitude of the diaspora is best reflected in Sinovčić's booklet published in 1991:

> Our fourth, state building (*državotvorna*) emigration arrived in a completely unknown land, and when it comes to our compatriots who were already living there, to a purely hostile surrounding. Apart from a small group of our patriots, who, as remnants of the once powerful organization—Croatian Home Guard—gathered around their small social headquarters, who had been there since before the war, and a newly arrived religious and the secular clergy, who had already become involved in the church and social life of this country, everything else was (as far as our compatriots were concerned) hostile towards us, and to such an extent that the first groups were also viciously attacked. It is truly incomprehensible and inexplicable how, in just a few years, Četnik partisan (in both cases Yugoslav) propaganda managed to capture the soul and national feelings of the Croatian people in these areas as well. Better relations have not been achieved until today. Therefore, when we talk about Croatian immigrants, about Croats in Argentina, we can count mainly on post-war, political, state-building emigration.[63]

The most prominent example of a Yugoslav-turned-Croatian association is the Jorgovan folklore association, founded in 1952, that briefly explained the process:

62 Krnić, *Crni kaput, bijele rukavice*, 45.

63 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990* (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1991), 46 and 48.

> From its beginnings the Jorgovan Ensemble presented itself as Yugoslav. This was because at the time when their elders arrived in Argentina, that was their nationality. Due to the declaration of independence of Croatia and Slovenia, which led to a bloody armed conflict that caused the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, an extraordinary democratic assembly was held in our society to decide which of the former Yugoslav countries should continue to represent. A vote was agreed, and its result was to represent Croatia, since that is where most of the members came from. This was accepted by those who did not belong to that country, understanding and being very clear that the most important thing was the legacy of unity that always characterized Jorgovan.[64]

There were also those who did not join or change their names into Croatian associations, whether because they were not of Croatian origin or they simply felt loyalty to Yugoslavia. Such was the case of Sociedad Mutua Yugoslava "Naš Dom" founded in 1878 as Sociedad Austrohúngara that continued to call itself Yugoslav and changed its name to Sociedad Mutual Croata Argentina "Naš Dom" only recently, in 2022.

Declassification of Nazi Files

Just when—from the perspective of the political diaspora—everything was falling into place and the dream of independent Croatia came true, the issue of Nazi arrivals to Argentina after World War II resurfaced as a result of an op-ed in the *New York Times* written by Gerald Posner, US journalist who was investigating the case of Josef Mengele, stating that he saw "thick files" in the archives of the federal police of Argentina concerning Martin Bormann, Hitler's private secretary.[65] This put Argentina under scrutiny and the reaction from President Menem was swift. On February 3, 1992, he adopted a decree declassifying the archives related to Nazis "for reasons of state"[66] and stated that "a debt towards humanity has been paid."[67] As

64 Jorgovan Ensemble website: https://ensamblejorgovan.blogspot.com/2008/12/historia-del-conjunto-de-msica-y-danzas.html.

65 Gerald Lee Posner, "Argentina's Nazi File Has Answers to Mystery," *New York Times*, December 7, 1991. He later co-authored a book on Mengele: Gerald Lee Posner and John Ware, *Mengele: The Complete Story* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000).

66 "Archivos sobre documentación Nazi," Decreto 232/92, February 5, 1992, https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto-232-1992-42878/texto.

67 "Menem: se pagó una deuda contraída con toda la humanidad," *La Nación*, February 4, 1992, 4.

soon as the archives were made available, a series of newspaper articles were published about the topic. The exclusive coverage was given by the magazine *SOMOS*, published in three subsequent weekly issues, announcing "for the first time the secret files, clandestine life, political and economic contacts of war criminals," such as Adolf Eichmann, Josef Mengele, and Josef Franz Schwamberger.[68] The second and the third part of the special issue asked, "Where are the missing papers?" in the cases of Walter Kutschmann,[69] and Eduard Roschmann.[70] Other journalists also started to reveal some data, such as *Clarín*'s Jorge Camarasa, who wrote that "a network of complicities impeded the extradition of Mengele in 1959."[71] *Clarín* published a statement by Simon Wiesenthal that there were another fourteen Nazi war criminals living in Argentina, stressing that while the government investigated the whereabouts of those fourteen people, researchers and journalists from around the world would continue to await the public display of the rest of the secret files, such as those for Mengele, Eichmann, Kutschmann, and the help they got from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the Catholic Church. They also stressed that on March 3, 1992, the deadline for the opening of the secret archives would expire, and that they were waiting for the sending of the documents by the ministry of foreign affairs, the air force, the marine, and the province police. "If these archives exist," *Clarín* concluded.[72] Furthermore, *Página 12* revealed that Wilfred von Oven, Goebbels's secretary, was living in Bella Vista without hiding his identity. Von Oven was editor of the German newspaper in Argentina *Freie Presse* that also regularly published anti-Yugoslav propaganda during the Cold War. The journalist Raul Kollmann stated that the federal police is

68 "Primicia Mundial-Nazis en la Argentina," *SOMOS*, February 3, 1992, Year 14, no. 801. Schwamberger was commander of various SS forced labor camps in the Krakow district, Poland. After the petition by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, he was tracked down in 1987 in Argentina and extradited to West Germany in 1990, where he was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Stuttgart regional court in 1992. He died in prison in 2004, at the age of ninety-two.

69 Kutschmann was a German SS and Gestapo officer and member of the *Einsatzkommando* in the Lviv region. He was first tracked down in 1975 by an Argentinian journalist Alfredo Serra when the first extradition request was made, but he disappeared. He was tracked down again in 1985, and a second extradition request was made but he died in Argentina in a hospital prison 1986 before being extradited.

70 Roschmann was known as "the butcher of Riga." A commander of the Riga ghetto, he fled to Argentina with the IRC Passport in 1948, and became an Argentinian citizen in 1968 under the name of Federico Wegener. His extradition request made by West Germany in 1977 was rejected on the grounds of having no bilateral extradition agreement. He fled to Paraguay where he soon died under suspicious circumstances that lead to doubts whether the body was really his.

71 Jorge Camarasa, *Clarín*, February 25, 1992.

72 "Aún vivirían en la Argentina otros 14 criminales de guerra", *Clarín*, February 20, 1992, 6.

in the possession of files on "German, Yugoslav, Hungarian, and Austrian immigrants that could have links to Nazism,"[73] while Clarín also stressed that "the Nazis arrived with the refugees."[74]

However, a year passed, and "the debt towards humanity" was not paid. This led to a new wave of criticisms by the DAIA, the umbrella organization of Jewish organizations in Argentina, and Simon Wiesenthal labeling the 1992 decree "a political show."[75] Eugenio Rom, the director of the General Archive of the Nation, also stated that the commitment was not fulfilled and that they did not get access to any of the documents, and Gerald Posner stated that the files that he saw in 1992 were "absentee folders," meaning that they were now missing. Wiesenthal also stated that the government was hiding information, and they selected the most harmless files for Peronism.[76] However, Rom stated that it was "no Peronist conspiracy, but a conspiracy of useless and lazy (public servants)," most importantly, the ministry of foreign affairs and the intelligence department of the police of the province of Buenos Aires.[77] The argument of the ministry of foreign affairs was that the 1992 decree was not about transferring the archives, but making the documentation available, which was done, since several journalists and researchers had already visited it. They stated that "they weigh several tons and the researchers should make requests precisely." The ministry of foreign affairs archives contained documentation from the Argentinian consulates in Genoa, Marseille, and Barcelona during World War II and ten years later. The *New York Times* also published a piece stating that "Argentina yields no new Nazi data."[78] On February 12, 1993, the minister of foreign affairs Guido Di Tella relaunched the opening of the Nazi archives.[79]

The 1992 and 1993 declassification and opening of the so-called Nazi archives in Argentina gave way to two important research projects. The first was almost immediately launched by the DAIA, the Proyecto Testimonio (Testimony Project) which looked into "the hidden forms that accompanied the operations through which different governments made possible the

73 Raúl Kollmann, "Un hombre capaz," *Página 12*, February 11, 1992, 3.

74 "Los nazis venían con los refugiados," *Clarín*, February 25, 1992, 6.

75 "Fue un show," *Página 12*, February 3, 1993, 2/3.

76 "Fue un show," *Página 12*, February 3, 1993, 2/3.

77 Nathaniel C. Nash, "Argentina Yields No New Nazi Data," *New York Times*, February 8, 1993, 12.

78 Nash, "Argentina yields no new Nazi data," 12.

79 Raúl Kollmann, "La Cancillería relanza la apertura de los archivos nazis," *Página 12*, February 12, 1993, 4.

entry of Nazis and the penetration of Nazi ideology in the country."[80] After six years of research, in 1998 two volumes were published, the first part containing a selection of ninety-seven documents describing the anti-Jewish policies in Germany and other countries from 1933 to 1945, and a selection of notes and paragraphs from administrative procedures showing the hidden aspects of Argentinian migratory policy with the entry of "refugees" during the immediate post-World War II era. The second volume is a collection of documents—responses of the Argentinian state to the requests of extradition of war criminals such as Mengele and Priebke, but also Pavelić, which have been used as a source of this book.[81]

Another project was President Carlos Menem's May 1997 creation of the Commission for the Clarification of Nazi Activities in Argentina (CEANA), "whose functions will consist of investigating the activities of Nazism in the Argentine Republic during World War II and its consequences during the postwar period; in particular the income and presence of people, property and values."[82] The creation of CEANA was "due to the fact that at the international level there have been complaints about the effects and consequences in Argentine territory of the activities of Nazism, in particular the entry or presence of people, property or values confiscated from the victims of said regime and its perpetrators."[83] CEANA made public its first report out of three on November 18, 1998. The final report was published in 1999. The report, among other things, states that 180 Nazi war criminals entered Argentina, among them fifty Croats (out of around 17,000 post-World War II refugees) and around 200 kilos of gold from the Croatian central bank.[84]

80 Rubén Beraja, "Prólogo", in *Proyecto testimonio. Revelaciones de los archivos argentinos sobre política oficial en la era nazi-fascista*, ed. Beatriz Gurevich. Vol. 1. DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1998), 13.

81 "Ante Pavelic y colaboradores" (Ante Pavelić and collaborators file), in *Proyecto testimonio: Respuestas del Estado Argentino ante los pedidos de extradición de criminales de guerra y reos del delito contra la humanidad bajo el Tercer Reich*, ed. Paul Warzawski, vol. 2. DAIA Centro de Estudios Sociales (Buenos Aires: Planeta 1998), 67–77.

82 Decree 390 / 1997. Poder Ejecutivo Nacional (PEN) Comisiones Actividades del Nazismo. Fecha de sanción 06-05-1997 Publicada en el Boletín Nacional del 12 de Mayo de 1997 https://www.saij.gob.ar/390-nacional-creacion-comision-para-esclarecimiento-actividades-nazismo-republica-argentina-dn19970000390-1997-05-06/123456789-0abc-093-0000-7991soterced?.

83 Decree 390/1997, Introduction.

84 Dennis Reinhartz, "Huida de los Ustasha a la Argentina después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial," in *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de las Actividades Nazis en la Argentina—CEANA, Informe final* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1999).

"El Ustasha," "a Normal Person," and a Victim of "a Jewish Nose Poke": Dinko Šakić, Ivo Rojnica, and Mirko Eterović

The whole scandal did not have much effect on the Croatian political émigré community. They thought that this issue did not concern them, and they were relaxed because they were not under scrutiny and walked freely in Argentina. This was until in 1998, when journalist Jorge Camarasa interviewed Dinko Šakić in his home in the beach resort of Santa Teresita and transmitted the piece in *Telenoche Investiga* shown on Canal 13 titled "El Ustasha" on April 6, 1998.[85] In the interview, Camarasa asked Šakić about his role in the NDH and particularly in Jasenovac. Šakić stated that he was "a Croatian patriot who fought for my people … so I was a man of trust." When asked whether he was a commander of the Jasenovac camp, he said: "No, I was director, not commander, it was just for one hundred days," and that when he was the director "no guard or administrator could touch any prisoner," and that he was "not talking about what happened before or after, but while I was there, no one could touch anyone," while claiming that there were around 1,500–2000 people who worked there and that the prisoners were self-governed: "the Jews themselves had their own internal administration, we did not interfere, we were external security, the Jews had their own administration within the camp. They distributed work, they distributed food, everything, everything, they were a State within the other State." He also said that there were no executions in the camp and that "people died of natural death as anywhere else."[86]

He later stated that he arrived in Argentina in 1947 and joined Peronism in 1955:

> When everyone else tore up their party membership cards, I joined and I still have it … Out of gratitude to general Perón and the Peronism that opened the door for us. Because we would be ungrateful to wash our hands … Argentina and President Perón and Evita helped us personally." He also bragged about having political connections and friends in the congress. He concluded that he had a calm conscience "because I saved and helped whoever I could. I saved many people.[87]

85 Jorge Camarasa "El Ustasha" – interview with Dinko Šakić. *Telenoche Investiga,* April 6, 1998. The video recording of the interview was provided courtesy of Ignacio Mendihalarzu and Guillermo Sierra (Artear).

86 Camarasa "El Ustasha".

87 Camarasa "El Ustasha".

This was not the first public statement that Šakić gave to the press. He had spoken three years earlier when he gave an interview to Croatian journalist Aleksa Crnjaković that was published in February 1995, so it was probably made during Tuđman's visit to Argentina in December 1994.[88] The interview was given in Hotel Alvear in Buenos Aires, and he used the occasion to announce the publishing of his memoirs of the times he spent "With Poglavnik in the Alps," as the memoir book title says. His statements were in line with what he repeated to Camarasa in 1998, that it was a self-governed camp, denying mass killings, and again repeating that his conscience was clear: "I am proud of my past, of everything I did. I did my duty towards my homeland. There is no state in the world without prisons and camps, and someone must do that ungrateful duty … I sleep as a baby. If I had the opportunity to carry out the same duty, I would accept it."[89] He also justified what was done in 1941–45 with what came after the Bleiburg postwar killings: "After everything we lived through, after May 1945, and today, I repeat: I would do the same. … I am sorry for every human life, but I have to say that I am sorry that we have not done everything that they say that we did because if we had done that then, today Croatia would not have any problems, there would be nobody writing lies about us."[90] The lies he was referring to were, according to him, Serbian lies about the NDH being fascist, as well as presenting Jasenovac as a place of torture.

He also stated the relevance of the NDH for today's Croatia: "Today we can prove mathematically that, if NDH had not existed for the four years of war, there could not have been a 30 May 1990. NDH was the fundament on which today's Croatia was built." When asked why he did not go to Croatia (yet), he said "Because I thought it would cause problems to President Tuđman, that the head of Jasenovac, a war criminal is walking around Zagreb. But I hope to come at the beginning of next year and stay. We shall see … I am ready to go and sit at the accused bench before a Croatian national court to respond for everything that I did while performing my duty in the defense of my Homeland. Under one condition: that others who were destroying the Croatian state also stand trial."[91]

The local Argentinian press swiftly reacted to the *Telenoche Investiga* interview and started to write intensely about Šakić. Camarasa was the first

88 Aleksa Crnjaković, "Dinko Šakić, Upravitelj Jasenovca Dinko Šakić: Obavljao sam svoju dužnost," *Magazin*, br. 8, February 1995.

89 Crnjaković, "Dinko Šakić," 27.

90 Crnjaković, "Dinko Šakić," 28.

91 Crnjaković, "Dinko Šakić," 29.

to publish a piece on "yet another high Nazi official residing in Argentina,"[92] revealing other details from the interview, stating that he lived in Spain for seven years and that he traveled to Paraguay where he oversaw a "Croatian farm" (in fact a military training camp named Janka Puszta, after the late 1920s/1930s camp in Hungary that the Ustaša held for incursions and terrorist attacks in Yugoslavia), and met with Paraguayan dictator Stroessner, and also Perón through his Ustaša bodyguard Milo de Bogetich. He even stated that he met President Tuđman in Buenos Aires in December 1994, and that they chatted for sixteen minutes. The interview had immediate legal consequences. Victor Ramos, head of the INADI (National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism) pressed charges to federal court no. 12 in the charge of Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral. Šakić left his home in Santa Teresita for the embassy. Many Croatian émigré community members distanced themselves from Šakić. Mladen Rojnica, son of Ivo Rojnica, declared: "When the president of Croatia Franjo Tuđman came, we had to kick Šakić out of San Martín Square because he started monologuing and talking nonsense. He is an unbalanced man capable of doing anything."[93] However, his wife Nada Šakić claimed that he had photos with Tuđman and that it was all "Serb conspiracy."[94]

The next day, Argentina decided that it would expel him even if no country requested his extradition.[95] And on April 10, 1998, Camarasa published a list of Croatian war criminals living in Argentina, also citing the US CIC report on Ante Pavelić and his Vatican connections, especially the then subsecretary Giovanni Batista Montini, later pope Paul VI.[96] He also mentioned the Croatian group within the Peronist movement of foreigners and his members, and that the house where Pavelić had lived in El Palomar was Argentinian state property. The article closes with Pavelić's successors in the HOP: Hefer, Asančaić, and Marković, all living in Argentina. Some pieces mention that Šakić was wanted in Paraguay for different accounts, including links with the Ambassador Abdala assassination in 1976 and—citing Swedish diary *Aftonbladet* from July 16, 1977—the Croats who killed Yugoslav ambassador Rolović in 1971, kidnapped the SAS airplane in 1972, and settled in Paraguay, as well as links with the embezzlement of 3.5 million USD from the Latin

92 Jorge Camarasa, "Otro jerarca nazi reside en Argentina", *La Nación*, April 7, 1998, 15

93 "Pidieron la captura del jefe nazi descubierto por la TV," *La Nación*, April 8, 1998, 12.

94 "Pidieron la captura del jefe nazi descubierto por la TV," *La Nación*, April 8, 1998, 12.

95 Hernán Cappiello, "La Argentina expulsará al jefe nazi (si nadie reclama su extradición)," *La Nación,* April 9, 1998.

96 Jorge Camarasa, "Los máximos criminales de guerra croatas vivieron en la Argentina," *La Nación*, April 10, 1998, 11.

American Anti-Communist Federation for future Croatian colonies in Paraguay.[97] Šakić was eventually arrested on May 2, 1998,[98] and Menem authorized his extradition to Croatia on May 15,[99] while refusing his extradition to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that also requested it.[100]

He was transferred to Croatia on June 17, 1998. The state attorney's office indicted Šakić for crimes against civilians committed during the time he was camp commander at Jasenovac between April and November 1944. He was accused of personally carrying out executions during the same period. The opening of the trial on March 15, 1999, was attended by around seventy reporters and representatives of some foreign embassies in Zagreb. He was sentenced to the maximum of twenty years in prison.[101] He died in a prison hospital in Zagreb on July 20, 2008, and was buried in Zagreb in a Ustaša uniform.[102] At the funeral, the priest Vjekoslav Lasić gave a speech in which he pointed out that the "NDH is the foundation of today's Homeland of Croatia," provoking indignation and strong protests by the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center from Jerusalem, Ephraim Zuroff.[103]

His wife's extradition was also authorized in August 1998.[104] She was accused by a Croatian court of war crimes as the commander of the NDH women's death camp in Stara Gradiška. She was interrogated for half an hour and released. She then stayed in Zagreb where she maintained contacts with two other women who were former Ustaša guards at Stara Gradiška, Milka Pribanić and Ljerka Kordić. She was accused of war crimes and genocide by a court in Serbia. She died in 2011 in a nursing home in Zagreb.[105]

97 Barrett Puig, "Dinko Šakić ya había sido denunciado en 1977 en una publicación paraguaya", *La Nación*, April 10, 1998, 11.

98 Oscar E. Balmaceda, "Sakic fue deteindo y será extraditado a Croacia," *La Nación*, May 2, 1998, 17.

99 Decree 583/98: The extradition is granted and the immediate delivery to the Republic of Croatia of a naturalized Argentine citizen is authorized. Buenos Aires, 5/15/98 B.O: 5/19/98 https://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/50000-54999/50891/norma.htm.

100 Decree 619/98: The extradition of a naturalized Argentine citizen requested by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is denied. June 10, 1998.

101 Sven Milekić, "No Remorse: A Croatian WWII Camp Commander on Trial Zagreb," *BIRN*, June 19, 2018.

102 World Jewish Congress, "Croatian War Criminal's Burial in Ustasha Uniform Condemned," August 1, 2018. https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/croatian-war-criminal-s-burial-in-ustasha-uniform-condemned?print=true.

103 "Disgraceful events at the funeral of Dinko Šakić in Zagreb," *DW*, July 31, 2008.

104 Decree 980/98: A request for the extradition of a Croatian citizen, presented by the Republic of Croatia, is processed. Bs. As., 21/8/98 https://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/50000-54999/52484/norma.htm.

105 Martina Bitunjac, *Le donne e il movimento ustascia* (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2013), 197–205.

In the remaining Croatian journals in Argentina, such as *Studia Croatica*, there was practically no news or reaction to the events, except for one small reference. A piece in December 1998 by Christophe Dolbeau on how "54 years ago, the Partisans purified Dubrovnik," said: "Among the great crimes that remained unpunished and voluntarily hidden that occurred during World War II is the massacre of the Dubrovnik elite in October 1944. At a time when some preach examination of conscience and collective repentance, at a time when the trial against Dinko Šakić begins and anti-fascism is once again in fashion, perhaps it would be appropriate to also remind all those that the only thing they received from the triumphant Communism of unity and brotherhood were twelve bullets in their bodies."[106] However, as we shall see in the next chapter, Šakić's arrest and trial remained a painful memory that troubled the narrative of the political émigré community.

Soon after the case of Dinko Šakić was revealed, and with his imminent extradition, another Croat, Ivo Rojnica,[107] was requested by the Simon Wiesenthal Center to be tried by Croatia, but the Croatian government answered that there was no evidence to support such request. In fact, on May 11, 1998, Rojnica traveled to Croatia to the funeral of Gojko Šušak.[108] After coming back, Rojnica gave an exclusive interview distancing himself from Šakić, saying that he was innocent and that he was forced to accept the position of the Stožernik (Governor) of Dubrovnik: "I had to do it, there was no civilian or military governor. You had to do what the Nazis asked," stating that the accusation was "a big lie invented by Serbs and Communists." When asked by Camarasa why he was attacked, he answered: "Because I am a Croatian national hero, the same way as San Martín was attacked by Spain or Jefferson by England." The journalist then asked him: "So you think you are Croatian San Martín?" and Rojnica answered: "I was a fighter for the independence of my country and that is why they are on my back." He also stated that he changed his name because of the Communist prosecution, "as the Jews also did." When he was asked about Šakić, he preferred not to talk about him and explained why: "Because I am a normal person."[109]

Again, no mentioning of this case in *Studia Croatica*, which is logical since Rojnica was its patron. The only mention that I found was in a review of the third volume of his book *Susreti i doživljaji* in 2000, which "show us the

106 Christophe Dolbeau, "Hace 54 años, los partisanos purificaban Dubrovnik," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXIX, No. 138, December 1998, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/138/138.htm#_Toc269903551.

107 Jorge Camarasa, "Piden la extradición de otro croata," *La Nación*, May 14, 1998, 1 and 21.

108 Policía: En pocas palabras (in a nutshell), "Viaje de un sospechoso," *Clarín*, May 11, 1998, 61.

109 Camarasa, "Piden la extradición," 1 and 21.

struggle of the Croatian people for their freedom and independence." The piece is a eulogy for Rojnica, who "always held the flag of patriotism very high and was very active in the years 41–45 during the Independent State of Croatia," and "never abandoned the desire to serve Croatia. When he could, he helped the work of his compatriots and thus he connected with many people who worked in the same direction." He "also worked on uniting all the Croatian forces, first the exiles in the Croatian National Council—HNV and then those in Croatia," concluding that "Ivo Rojnica contributed a lot so that good could win and in 1990, he received two awards. One was the pontifical decoration, for the good works that he had done during all those years. And the other prize was being able to visit Croatia, kiss its sacred land and see it on the path to its total liberation."[110]

In July 1999, yet another investigation started, this time against Mirko Eterović, who was under suspicion of being the head of a concentration camp on the island of Brač.[111] He was located in Córdoba where he was working as language professor at the School of Languages and the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the National University of Córdoba, and there was no extradition request against him. Therefore, he immediately left the country and went to London where one of his children lived, and then to Croatia waiting for the investigation initiated by Judge Gustavo Literas to be resolved.[112] Regarding the Eterović case, Neda Rosandić Šarić, the then Croatian ambassador to Argentina recalls:

> The enemies were constantly on the prowl against the Croats, and in 1999, they started accusing him through the newspapers, that he was a war criminal, that during the existence of the Independent State of Croatia he was the head of the camp and that he was responsible for killing people. The accusations soon spread through the Argentinian media. Prof. Eterović and his family were affected, but also all Croats in Argentina .... The accusation was maliciously framed, it interpreted that prof. Eterović was *logornik*, which means the camp warden. In reality, *logornik* was a lower position within the Ustaša organization. But the campaign could not be considered a joke, several Jewish organizations

110 Mira Dugački, "Ivo Rojnica: Encuentros y sucesos," *Studia Croatica*, Year XLI, Buenos Aires, May 2000, No. 141, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/141/141.htm#_Toc269922611.

111 "Cuando los nazis están entre nosotros: localizaron en Córdoba a un criminal de guerra que dirigió un campo de concentración," *Página 12*, July 3, 1999.

112 Orlando Andrada, "Abandonó el país el croata acusado de ser un criminal de guerra. Escape: Mirko Eterovic dejó Córdoba para dirigirse a Londres, donde vive uno de sus hijos; fue imputado por la DAIA y por el Inadi," *La Nación,* July 8, 1999.

> and other associations in which the enemies of the Croats were active were involved in it. Soon, the Argentine judiciary also got involved. I will not go into details, I would only say that the Embassy of the Republic of Croatia played, I believe, a positive role in ending the case as quickly and favorably as possible. Our advice was that it was time for prof. Eterović to go to Croatia, where he had not been for decades since he had to leave in May 1945. Croatia was free and in the meantime, he could find refuge there until the case was resolved. Prof. Eterović and his family accepted the advice. The devoted family waged a legal battle in Argentina to have the charges dismissed entirely … The lawyers successfully proved that the accusations were unfounded, the Argentinian court issued a final acquittal in December 1999, and another Croatian drama was over.[113]

After his acquittal he came back in December 1999.[114] He said in an interview: "What fascism, what Nazism, what Communism? That has nothing to do with me, I am against all that." He stated that during World War II he was a public defender or ombudsman and, referring to the Jews, he said: "if, when they were leaving prison, any of them were in the hands of the Germans, I did everything possible to get them out and hand them over to a Croatian who managed to take them to Italy, where they were completely safe, because Mussolini was not pursuing them. We didn't want Germans or Italians." When asked about Šakić he said that he had never met him but that "the data for his extradition were false," stating that the intellectuals were the target of those "who poked their noses into the Ministry of the Interior. They didn't want just anyone, so they messed with two or three intellectuals." When asked who the nose pokers were, he concluded: "Probably Jews, probably. They can go wherever they want," portraying himself as a victim of Jewish complot.[115]

Unlike the two first cases, the Croatian community reacted to the accusation of Eterović, "a prestigious university professor from Córdoba," as published by *Studia Croatica*. They explained that there was never a concentration camp in Supetar, Brač, so Eterović could hardly have been its commander, or anyone else, and also that on the island of Brač, "none

113 Neda Rosandić Šarić, *Domovina iznad svega—Moj otac Mime Rosandić* (Čitluk: Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Čitluku, 2021), 112–13.

114 "Tras probar su inocencia, regresó al país Eterovic. Croata: el profesor de 86 años que fue acusado de crímenes durante la guerra no tenía pedido de captura, según el juez Literas," *Página 12*, December 15, 1999.

115 Mónica Gutiérrez, "Reportaje a Mirko Eterodik 'Los judíos metieron las narices,'" *Página 12*, December 15, 1999.

of those Jews suffered at the hands of the Ustaša and no one was taken to a concentration camp, but rather they lived in freedom, although the civil government was theoretically in the hands of the Ustaša. On the other hand, the Italians shot twenty Jews on the island of Korčula in 1943, but that fact was covered by the cloak of silence," concluding: "Who invented this criminal idiocy about Eterović? Did they not even read the Jewish sources mentioned? And some of them were even translated into English."[116] There were several concentration camps (*confinazione libera*) for Jews in Dalmatia under the Italian occupation and command, one of them on the island of Brač, in Sumartin, but they were all soon transferred to the Kampor concentration camp on the island of Rab, again under Italian command.

The 1990s Zeitgeist

Two speeches illustrate this period of the encounter between "emigrated and homeland Croatia" in the 1990s, the term "emigrated" referring only to the political émigrés. The first one was given by Franjo Tuđman on his visit to Argentina on December 1, 1994, claiming that it was "one of those meetings that transcend history itself … when the emigrated and persecuted Croatia meets with the Croatian leadership, which is a sign that we finally have a free, independent, sovereign and internationally recognized state," in line with the narrative that they preserved for forty-five years.[117] At first, he was not directly talking about the NDH and the Ustaša, but about "living the dream that the Croatian people dreamed of for centuries … for which the heroes, the intellectuals, the Croatian people died and with which they died in prisons, in the trenches, in the battle lines, in their homes, and that is the ideal of a free and independent Croatia." Then he made an explicit reference to the NDH as part of this dream of an independent state that the Croats had lost "in that distant time and more recently at the end of World War II" (referring to the NDH), due to "the disunity of the Croatian nation"[118]. According to Tuđman, this disunity was overcome in the 1990s by uniting the homeland and the emigrated Croatia, two pillars of the Republic

116 "Mirko Eterovic," *Studia Croatica,* Year XL, Buenos Aires, No. 140/ October 1999, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/140/140.htm#_Toc269914385.

117 "Conceptos principales del dr. Franjo Tudjman en el acto del Teatro Nacional Cervantes el 1 de diciembre de 1994," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXVI, No. 128, March 1995, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/128/128.htm#_Toc270139988.

118 The "distant time" refers to the twelfth century when the Croatian kingdom passed into the hands of Hungarian Árpád dynasty.

of Croatia. This for Tuđman meant the reconciliations of "those who fought on opposite sides in World War II, both believing that they were fighting for Croatia", thus dispelling the myth of the Ustaša and other political émigrés being the only ones fighting for Croatia, and insisting on unity and shaking hands, because "We may have political differences. But the Croatian State has to be a central concern for everyone,", and addressing specifically the audience in Argentina, "where you arrived when you were persecuted, I invite you, the most combative defenders of the homeland and its spirit, to maintain the idea of Croatian reconciliation."[119]

At the press conference during his visit to Argentina, when asked about the issue of national minorities and the right of self-determination of Croatia in Yugoslavia, Tuđman responded that Croatia "had its state during World War II in the New Order imposed by Hitler but also within the framework of the anti-fascist movement on which the creation of the new Croatian state was based. And according to Tito's Constitution, the Croatian people did have the right to secede, to self-determination, and not as a minority."[120] In line with his all- Croat reconciliation project, on the one hand he flirted with the theory of an independent state project that was "coincidentally" supported by Hitler, and on another, he was stating that the basis of the Republic of Croatia is antifascist. In a similar line he also thanked Argentina for having received numerous Croats for two centuries, and especially after World War II,

> when so many Croats found themselves scattered by the maelstrom of the events, when they had to leave their homeland because they lost the war and the state that they wanted to build, when other countries in the world did not want to receive them. But Argentina did receive them and in this was not wrong, because those Croats were not, as Belgrade propaganda has claimed until now, war criminals or fascists, but patriots who wanted to build their state, just as those who fought in the anti-fascist movement with the partisans, only they wanted to do it within a Federal Yugoslavia.[121]

He again whitewashes the NDH regime and portrays the émigré community as victims of history and Serbian propaganda. He concludes: "the Croatians

119 "Conceptos principales del dr. Franjo Tudjman en el acto del Teatro Nacional Cervantes el 1 de diciembre de 1994," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXVI, No. 128, March 1995, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/128/128.htm#_Toc270139988.

120 "Conferencia de prensa del dr. Tudjman del 2 de diciembre de 1994," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXVI, March 1995, No. 128, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/128/128.htm#_Toc270139988

121 "Conferencia de prensa del dr. Tudjman del 2 de diciembre de 1994," *Studia Croatica*.

were present in all kinds of activities in Argentina and that is why, in addition to thanking this country for receiving the Croatians, especially after World War II, we express our pride in their contribution to Argentina."[122]

Another speech reflects the view from the political émigré community, given by José Nicolás Rukavina, member of the second generation, on the occasion of the Croatian official delegation visit in July 1995 to president Menem's second inauguration. Rukavina stated that he was a proud "son of a Croatian patriot … whose path has been guided by the freedom and independence of Croatia and the decisive struggle to achieve them."[123] This is how he described his father Joso Rukavina, the Ustaša colonel, who, after carrying out several duties, in 1943 was appointed as the commander of police of the NDH armed forces until May 1945. In Argentina he was a member of the HOP council.[124] He then stated that, although his Croatian language was not good because he was born in Argentina and he never went to Croatia, he was brought up to love Croatia as if he were born there, showing how the intergenerational transmission of memory and identity among the Croatian diaspora operates: "For us, the descendants of exiles, Croatia has always represented not only the dream among dreams, the open wound in the collective soul, the land where our ancestors rest and our loved ones suffer, the mother of our legendary heroes, the ancient legacy of faith and culture in which our roots are nourished, the source of the melodies that surround our hearts and the traditions that characterize us," and that this education also meant a token and a vow: "to continue—although in different circumstances and by other means—the unfinished struggle of our fathers, to keep alive—especially in the difficult post-war years—the torch of national ideals, to feed the conscience national, demonstrate the lies contained in enemy propaganda, explain to the world that we are not 'Yugoslavs' but Croats, ancient and cultured people of Europe to whom it is not possible to deny the inalienable right to freedom and independence of their national state, this as an irreplaceable presupposition of the only possibility of fulfillment for the men and women of that long-suffering land."[125] Here he clearly reflects and summarizes the whole victimization narrative of a cultured and persecuted nation, and their sacred mission that

122 "Conferencia de prensa del dr. Tudjman del 2 de diciembre de 1994," *Studia Croatica*.

123 "Saludo a la delegación croata. Palabras pronunciadas por el Dr. José Nicolás Rukavina durante la cena en honor a los ilustres visitantes que tuvo lugar en el Dom de San Justo el 9 de julio de 1995," *Studia Croatica*, Year XXXVI, No. 129, Buenos Aires, December 1995, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/129/129.htm#_Toc270140508.

124 Dizdar et al., *Tko je tko u NDH*, 351.

125 "Saludo a la delegación croata" *Studia Croatica*.

"constituted both an imperative of the collective conscience and a deep need of the soul that—regardless of the place of birth or the kilometers of distance—was transmitted from parents to children as a vital force—in this case multiplied by the heroic deed of April 1941 and the fruitful sacrifice of Bleiburg—a force that finds its inexhaustible source in the glory and tragedy of the ancient Croatian history!"[126]

For him, the dream of an independent Croatia that they were brought up with coming true was almost unreal, but it also represented a series of challenges on how to position themselves now and find a new identity: "All of these challenges—including an eventual return—place us in front of a field of unlimited possibilities and perspectives. In substance, these are new challenges that will have to find a response in that always same, endearing, renewed and fruitful love for Croatia." This statement shows how enthusiastic they were and how they thought that their narrative and their view of how an independent state of Croatia should look would finally and unconditionally be accepted. He concluded the speech by saying "patriots born in Croatia and outside of it live in distant Argentina, patriots who, … offer and receive the embrace of all Croatians in good faith, without distinction whether they are in the homeland or in the diaspora," stating that they are ready to leave the past behind for the sake of the future of their homeland and hoping that reconciled Croatia will finally "manage to consolidate a State which will be governed by God and Croatian men and women who will never again have to die for opposing flags."[127] As we shall see further in the text, their enthusiasm dissipated soon.

An Epilogue: The Death of Franjo Tuđman

The period of zeal and the dream come true when they could go back and show Croatia how much they yearned for it and how much they loved it with money ends with the end of the decade and the death of Franjo Tuđman on December 10, 1999. In his obituary, *Studia Croatica* stressed Tuđman's point of view: "first of all his opposition to forcing a guilt complex on the Croatian nation for the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during World War II and in particular for pointing out the exaggeration in the number of victims of Jasenovac, was the cause of his political and then judicial persecution," portraying him as a fighter for their cause, but disregarding

126 "Saludo a la delegación croata" *Studia Croatica*.
127 "Saludo a la delegación croata" *Studia Croatica*.

that he never claimed that Jasenovac was not an extermination camp. Also, the issue of an imposed and supposed guilt complex "regarding the NDH" alludes to something that was pressured from outside, while not stating why the members of the NDH should feel guilt. Then it gives an account of Tuđman's life path and contacts with the diaspora that also cost him prison sentences in the 1970s and 1980s, concluding that after that "in 1987, when he got his passport back after seventeen years, he traveled abroad—first to Canada and the United States and then to European countries—where, with his lectures, he managed to awaken and establish the national democratic movement among the Croatian emigrants. On 17 June 1989, he founded the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in Zagreb and became its president,"[128] implying that he recognized the importance of Croatian émigrés and that they form an integral part of the national democratic movement.

The journal also transmitted the speech by the director of the Croatian Heritage Foundation, Ante Beljo, returnee from Canada, at the commemorative event held at the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall in Zagreb. Beljo stressed that Tuđman "managed to recognize the signs of the times, to unite all the Croatian forces for the creation of the State, in the homeland and in the world," also mentioning Tuđman's goal of unity, the reason why he reached to Croats in North America and European countries, "to include the diaspora in the fight for democratic Croatia and for the creation of the conditions for our return from exile to the free and independent homeland," and why he got unconditional support from Croatian émigrés. However, Beljo, stresses that "while some inside and outside Croatia valued and respected Dr. Tuđman, others were much more than political rivals. It is not surprising that they brought the same attitude of rivalry towards Croatia and towards their emigration," implying that it is not the diaspora that holds the negative attitude, but the others, and these "others" are the Croats in Croatia. Beljo finished his speech saying that "after the physical disappearance of every great man and statesman, a great void remains."[129] And this void also meant a change in the relations between the diaspora and the homeland, or between "the emigrated and homeland Croatia."

128 "Franjo Tuđman," (1922–99) *Studia Croatica,* Year XLI, Buenos Aires, May 2000, No. 141, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/141/141.htm#_Toc269922605.

129 Ante Beljo, "El Presidente Tudjman y la diaspora," *Studia Croatica*, Year XLI, Buenos Aires, May 2000, No. 141, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/141/141.htm#_Toc269922605.

7. New Configurations in the 2000s

Abstract: The seventh chapter will treat the 2000s, when the Argentinean-born Croats become memory guardians and entrepreneurs. They re-signified their community history and changed their attitudes towards the new independent Croatia. It will also analyze their return to Croatia and the spillover of their memory into mainstream and official memory in the Republic of Croatia today, as well as the current relationship between the Croatian diaspora in Argentina and their homeland—Croatia.

Keywords: new millennium, new generations, planetary Croats, memory spillover

End of the Honeymoon Period (2000–2011)

The change of the century marked a new, low period of diaspora-kin-state relations. After Tuđman's death and the HDZ domination during the 1990s, the center-left coalition won the elections in 2000 and was in power until 2003. In 2003, the HDZ won again and was in power until December 2011, when the Social Democratic Party-led coalition won the elections (the so-called Kukuriku coalition) and was in power until January 2016. Since 2016, the HDZ-led coalitions have been in power with different coalition partners. With the change of government in 2000, Croatia started its path towards European integration, which also implied cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia by extraditing Croatian nationals accused of war crimes committed during the Homeland War. This was perceived by the émigrés as another attack against Croatian statehood and a sign that the struggle was not over.

The disappointment was especially profound regarding the treatment of Bleiburg in Croatia. Argentina's Croats thought their suffering and victims would finally be acknowledged. Instead, they got a "mild declaration"[1] by the

1 UACRA President Iva Vidić at the Bleiburg commemoration in 2011.

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-8

Croatian parliament condemning the crimes committed by the totalitarian Communist regime from 1945 until 1990,[2] based on the standpoints of resolution 1481 of the Council of Europe (2006).[3] The lack of acknowledgment in Croatia strengthened an identity of the true Croats among them and the determination to keep commemorating Bleiburg (and April 10) and exacerbated the new us vs. them dichotomy between the Croats in the diaspora and the Croats in independent Croatia.

This is very well reflected in the April 10, 2008 celebration speech given by Davorin Porić, a member of the 1.5 generation, who explained that the NDH's primary goal was to establish an independent state and that it had to accept the Nazi or fascist ideology of their allies. He stated that all Croatian political emigrants around the world (still) celebrate April 10, and pay "tribute to all those who, with their minds, work and lives, made it possible for the centuries-old dream of the Croatian people to finally come true," as well as regularly commemorate the Bleiburg Tragedy. He then claimed that the NDH army's participation in World War II was the "first Homeland War, against Serbian Četniks and partisans, among whom unfortunately there were many Croats." He also acknowledged that the first generation had almost perished, "but we, their sons and grandsons, managed to experience after forty-five years of the fall of the NDH the fruit of that political work abroad and also the fruit of internal residence in the homeland of Croatia: the breakup of Serbo-Communist Yugoslavia and the re-proclamation of a free and independent Republic of Croatia on May 30, 1990, headed by Dr. Franjo Tuđman."[4] He finally asked:

> Why is the historical reality of 10 April still being silenced? Why does Croatian diplomacy in the free world not interpret the Croatian truth about Nazism and fascism in Croatia during the NDH and why do our historians in the homeland not object against the false portrayals of "genocidal Croats" in front of the world and shamefully cover up Serbian crimes against Croats in the last eighty years? Probably those who could do it today and do not, and in the depths of their hearts never wanted to achieve an independent, democratic, and an independent Croatian state,

2 Declaration condemning crimes committed during the totalitarian communist regime in Croatia 1945-1990, *Official Gazette*, 76/2006, June 20, 2006, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2006_07_76_1786.html.

3 Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of Jan 25, 2006, on the need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian Communist regimes.

4 Davorin Porić, "Deseti travanj, povijestna stvarnost hrvatskog naroda," *Studia Croatica*, Vol. 152, 2008, http://www.studiacroatica.org/revistas/152/20080410_davorin.htm.

> but only circumstantially live there and enjoy being in power without their own struggle and effort.[5]

While it is not clear which historical reality he refers to precisely, he clearly alludes to the innocence of the NDH regime and requests that the current Croatian state (diplomacy and historians) cleans the face of the NDH. But, since they are not doing anything about it, according to him they are clearly anti-Croatians who did not fight for Croatian independence as the diaspora did. He then stresses that there is a danger that Croatia ends up again in a third, balkanized Yugoslav confederation with the entry of Croatia to the EU and NATO, but that Croatia is now a democratic country and "the Croatian people in their homeland and in the diaspora can, while there is still time for it, change national policies and people so that the independence and unreality of today's Republic of Croatia will be preserved forever from any attempts at new balkanization." He also states that

> The bloody consequence of the 10 April is the Bleiburg Tragedy, … the only political event that we jointly commemorate and recognize in emigration and in the homeland … All of us who have always fought and acted abroad or at home, for the establishment of an independent democratic Republic of Croatia and who really want it to continue to remain independent for all Croats around the world, must unite around our Bleiburg Tragedy to … save our homeland Croatia from all evils, of which surely a renewed alliance, whether economic or political, with the Serbs, in any Balkan confederation, is the worst and most unfavorable for Croatian interests.[6]

The narrative is again that the Bleiburg events were a punishment for wanting an independent state, but Bleiburg is reinterpreted from the current times, and it is a warning that Croats are still in danger from evil, and the biggest evil is being united with Serbs in a joint state again.

Almost all members of the first generation of the Croatian political émigré community (in Argentina and worldwide) died, so the Argentine-born generations continued with their (grand) parents' political militancy. As a result, they established radio shows, websites, and Facebook pages, and regularly inform the community on what is happening in Croatia, primarily drawing from radical right-wing news outlets such as narod.hr and dnevno.

5 Davorin Porić, "Deseti travanj, povijestna stvarnost hrvatskog naroda".

6 Davorin Porić, "Deseti travanj, povijestna stvarnost hrvatskog naroda". At that time, the Bleiburg commemorations were under the sponsorship of the Croatian Parliament.

hr. To maintain their identity as the "true and state-building" Croats, using new technologies, they resort to and find resonance with the messages of radical right Croatian politicians and historians at home, "living their real politics long-distance without accountability."[7] They were especially reactive towards Croatian Euro-Atlantic integrations, particularly in the field of human rights and accountability, and Croatian cooperation with the ICTY, since they saw the Homeland War as a continuation of their grandparents' struggle in World War II and the extradition of Croatian citizens to the tribunal as an act of treason, in line with the right-wing and nationalist rhetoric. In January 2012, when the referendum on Croatian accession to the EU was held, the Argentinian diaspora community voted against it with 52.73 percent of the votes. Together with Australia, this was the only community that voted against it.[8]

They also perceived the change in attitudes towards them from the homeland. The quotas of diaspora seats in the parliament were changed in 2000 according to the proportional turnout of diaspora voters—in 2000 it was reduced from twelve to six seats, in the 2003 elections there were four, and in the 2007 elections there were five (but always for the HDZ). In 2007, the diaspora vote decided on the shift of power balance in the parliamentary elections, enabling the HDZ coalition to win the elections. The diaspora was very well aware that it was "the 'bride' in the fall elections, who will be wooed by all the most important parties in Croatia," stating that there is nothing wrong with it and that the diaspora should imitate minority parties such as the Serbian Democratic Party and "make good use of their votes and the seats that they bring to the Parliament."[9] However, they also thought of founding a diaspora party in order to make the majority party fulfill their demands, concluding that "this is the only winning combination for the diaspora. In any other case, the diaspora will be interesting for all parties in Croatia only until the end of the elections. They will look after it and court it as long as they need her votes, and later, when they come to power, the representatives of the diaspora from the party lists will be more of a cog in the voting machine of the party they belong to than the representatives of the diaspora."[10] The party as such was never founded, but the diaspora mostly continued to vote for the HDZ.

7 Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Center for German and European Studies, University of California, 1992), 12.

8 Croatian Electoral Commission, https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/referendum-2012.

9 Petar Grubišić, "Dijaspora u Saboru kao politička snaga," *Večernji list*, May 23, 2007.

10 Petar Grubišić, "Dijaspora u Saboru kao politička snaga."

In 2010, during the constitutional changes enacted to prepare for Croatia's accession to the EU, the HDZ and the center-left parties reached an agreement leading to the constitutionally defined fixed quota of three representatives allocated to non-resident citizens.[11] However, their voting preferences have always been towards the HDZ or a right-wing candidate. In the 2009 presidential elections, they voted for Miroslav Tuđman, Franjo Tuđman's son, in the first round (54.01 percent), and for Milan Bandić in the second round (91.81 percent), because he was competing against the social democrat Ivo Josipović.[12]

In 2001 an experimental radio program, the Voice of Croatia, was established at Croatian National Radiotelevision. It started as a fifteen-minute news program in Spanish and English. Most of the initial speakers were members of the diaspora from Argentina and Bolivia in the case of the Spanish news, and Canada and the US in the case of the English news. Although focused on EU integration in this period, the kinstate further expanded Croatian language and cultural education abroad, financed by the ministry of education and science. Also, scholarships for youth of Croatian origin to come to study Croatian language and culture were introduced (*Croaticum*), and in 2003 the preparatory year of Croatian language for entering university was introduced.

Renewed Relations and Renewed Diaspora (2012–today)

After Croatia finished accession negotiations in June 2011 and joined the European Union in 2013, a regression occurred. First, the HDZ in opposition during the Kukuriku coalition turned sharply to the right, even accepting some extremist nationalists among its lines. Second, the generalized rise of extreme right parties in Europe also had its effect in Croatia, with the appearance of several radical right parties that interpret "any kind of liberal attitude as a specific Communist one."[13] Most of the constituent elements of the Croatian extreme right originate directly from the Ustaša movement: a strong authoritarian state, the territorial expansion of Croatia

11 Viktor Koska, "The Development of Kin-State Policies and the Croatian Citizenship Regime," *Minority Studies*, 16 (2013), 224.

12 In the first round of the Presidential elections in 2009, Bandić got 0.73 percent of the votes. Croatian Electoral Commission, https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/predsjednik-2009.

13 Tihomir Cipek, "The Spectre of Communism is Haunting Croatia: The Croatian Right's Image of the Enemy," *Politička misao* 54 no. 01+02 (2017): 150–69, 150.

to its ethnic borders, especially towards the Serbs, and a messianic mission of the Croatian nation as a bulwark of Catholic Christianity.[14] And this is where the diaspora found its echo chamber, contributing with the narrative they preserved for forty-five years and finding resonance at home.

By reinforcing the ideological cleavage from World War II, the diaspora at home and from abroad actively contributes to the "reduction of politics on the friend-enemy relation (which) endangers the main liberal values of democracy."[15] This mutually reinforcing mechanism of extremist and nationalist ideas ultimately erodes the degree of democracy in Croatia under the aegis of the freedom of speech. After Croatia concluded the accession negotiations on June 30, 2011, the HDZ government renewed links with the diaspora, marked with the adoption of the strategy and law on relations of the Republic of Croatia with Croats abroad by the Croatian parliament in October 2011, two months before losing elections and stepping from power. The law gives a broad definition of Croats abroad, including not only non-resident Croatian citizens but also ethnic Croats abroad (art. 3), and states that they are all part of one, undividable Croatian nation (art. 4). The act also founded (art. 12) the Central State Office for Croats Abroad (Središnji državni ured za Hrvate izvan Republike Hrvatske—SDUHIRH) and the council on Croats outside the Republic of Croatia, "an advisory body providing assistance to the Government of the Republic of Croatia in creating and implementing the policies, activities, and programs related to Croats outside the Republic of Croatia."[16] The radical novelty announced with the strategy and the law is the introduction of the legal status of a "Croat without Croatian citizenship," with specific cultural, social, and economic rights. In view of Croatian accession to the EU, the changes to the citizenship law in 2011 reduced the descendance from Croatian émigrés to the third generation and introduced an exam on Croatian language and culture, but in 2020 these provisions were abolished for article 11, which specifically targeted descendants from Croatian emigrants in the diaspora.

The office for Croats abroad established a program for financing special needs and projects of interest for the Republic of Croatia, divided into Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian minorities in Europe, and Croatian emigrants overseas. According to the available data, in 2014 the overall

14 Vedran Obućina, *Right-Wing Extremism in Croatia* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung International Policy Analysis, 2012).

15 Cipek, "The Spectre of Communism," 150.

16 Conclusions of the first plenary session of the second Council convocation of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for Croats outside the Republic of Croatia, 19 Dec 2017 https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/savjet_vlade//hmiu176776499.pdf

allocated budget for projects of interest abroad was 133,204 €, which was used to finance sixteen projects in South America and South Africa.[17] In 2015, the budget accounted for 200,000 €, used to finance eighteen projects in South America and South Africa, as well as eighteen more projects in 2016.[18] After the HDZ came back to power, the SDUHIRH budget was increased—for 2017 by 22.39 percent,[19] and in 2018 by an additional 12 percent.[20] In 2018, the SDUHIRH allocated a total of 307,000 € for forty-six projects overseas and in European countries (Argentina included),[21] and in 2019 the SDUHIRH allocated a total of 467,000 € for seventy-one projects overseas and in European countries (Argentina included).[22] In 2020, the SDUHIRH allocated a total of 426,000 € for seventy-one projects overseas and in European countries (Argentina included).[23] In 2021, with an annual budget of around 330,000 €, it allocated 42,000 € for the projects in Argentina.[24] In 2023, the budget rose to 1,100,000 €, and 63,500 € were allocated for projects in Argentina.[25] In the latest report, the budget was 905,850 € and the office allocated a total of 24,000 € to the projects in Argentina.[26] The project beneficiaries were

17 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad* (2014), https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/izvjesca//hmiu1042451376.pdf.

18 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad* (2015)

19 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad to the Croatian Parliament for 2016*, https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2019-01-18/081232/IZVJESCE_STRATGIJA_ODNOSI_RH_S_HRVATATIMA_IZVAN_RH%202016.pdf.

20 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad to the Croatian Parliament for 2018*, https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2019-05-29/133501/IZVJ_STRATEGIJA_ZAKON_HRVATI_IZVAN_RH_2018.pdf.

21 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad to the Croatian Parliament for 2018*, https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2019-05-29/133501/IZVJ_STRATEGIJA_ZAKON_HRVATI_IZVAN_RH_2018.pdf.

22 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad to the Croatian Parliament for 2019*, https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//NG/Zakoni_uredbe_pravilnici_izvješća//Godišnje%20izvješće%200%20radu%20za%202019.pdf.

23 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad for 2020*, thttps://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/izvjesca//Godišnje%20izvješće%200%20radu%20SDUHIRH-a%20za%202020.%20godinu.pdf.

24 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad to the Croatian Parliament 2021*, https://www.sabor.hr/godisnje-izvjesce-o-provedbi-strategije-i-zakona-o-odnosima-republike-hrvatske-s-hrvatima-izvan-4?t=130615&tid=210295.

25 SDUHIRH Odluka o dodjeli financijskih sredstava programima/projektima organizacija hrvatskog iseljeništva u prekomorskim i europskim državama za 2023. godinu, https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//Javni%20pozivi%20i%20natjecaji%202018//Odluka%20o%20dodjeli%20financijskih%20sredstava%20projektima%20organizacija%20hrvatskog%20iseljeni%C5%A1tva%20za%202023.%20godinu.pdf.

26 SDUHIRH, odluka o dodjeli financijske potpore za posebne potrebe i projekte od interesa zaHrvate izvan Republike Hrvatske za 2024. godinu, February 5, 2024, https://www.jabuka.tv/

always mainly in Buenos Aires, and mainly organizations stemming from the post-World War II diaspora.

In the meantime, the diaspora redefined its position towards the homeland. New media helped them create a network of like-minded diaspora members worldwide and at home. As Perić Kaselj stressed in her analysis of Croatian virtual social networks (CVSNs) in Argentina, the descendants of Croats lean towards the right, their ethnic identity is "emotionally stronger (nostalgia for an imagined homeland that does not exist) than in Croats in Croatia," and there are "cohesively strong CVSNs of descendants of political émigrés who are today the most vital and the most active segment of the diaspora (both online and offline) … There is a strong influence and transmission of traumatic memories through generational heritage (Bleiburg, refugee camps), and a moral obligation of the individuals towards the family and the nation in the sense of remembrance in order to never forget."[27] The CVSNs in Argentina "have an emphasized political participation, and in different national issues, they become an integrative part of Croatia and an active factor of the diaspora. Every form of endangering of Croatian national interests mobilizes these groups … Cyberspace makes it easy to establish networks of support and belonging with groups in the homeland and worldwide. The life and the memory of political émigrés in Argentina greatly influence their ethnic and national identity because they put themselves at the disposal of the Croatian nation and are advocating for Croatian national interests."[28] To maintain their identity as the "true and state-building" Croats, by using new technologies they resorted to and found resonance with the messages of radical right Croatian politicians and historians at home, maintaining their identity of "planetary Croats,"[29] "living their real politics long-distance without accountability."[30]

This virtuality and this monitoring of events in Croatia was reflected in February 2016 when the vice president of the Croatian parliament Vesna Pusić (member of the center-left Kukuriku coalition) in a program on Croatian Radiotelevision declared that the parliament should not sponsor the commemoration in Bleiburg given that it was an insult to the innocent

wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ProjektiHrvatiIzvanRH.pdf.

27 Marina Perić Kaselj, "Dijasporske zajednice u kiberprostoru: virtualni identiteti hrvatskih etničkih zajednica u Čileu i Argentini," *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 26 (2014): 91–119, 102.

28 Kaselj, "Dijasporske zajednice u kiberprostoru," 104.

29 Nikolina Židek, "Homeland Celebrations Far Away from Home: The Case of the Croatian Diaspora in Argentina," in *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities* (London: Routledge, 2019), 218.

30 Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism*, 12.

victims and that the event was a pretext for the glorification of the NDH and the Ustaša movement, and that it was a shame for Croatia. She added that not everyone who was murdered without trial was innocent, but rather they were just not found guilty through a judicial process.[31] In a few days, the UACRA called a public demonstration "in repudiation of the denial of the Croatian Genocide in Bleiburg."[32] Among the large audience, the demonstration was attended by Vjera Bulat, UACRA president, Juan Sarrafián, representative of the Armenian community and president of the Argentine federation of foreign communities, Maria Paula Agarie, representative of the Japanese community, and Kazimir Kovačić, survivor of Bleiburg and the death marches. On that occasion, the UACRA issued a final Declaration saying that: "We Argentinian-Croats, descendants of the Bleiburg generation, declare the Vice President of the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia Vesna Pusić 'persona non grata' in our community," proposing that parliament initiate the corresponding criminal proceedings against her for having justified said "genocide, perpetrated against the Croatian People."[33] In addition to demanding the prosecution of Vesna Pusić, the UACRA demanded that

> they investigate these crimes, denounce the culprits who committed them, that they can speak clearly about the Communist regime and the crimes that it systematically planned and carried out, and that , based on the truth, values that do not coincide with the falsehoods of Communism may be promoted, and, finally, that all efforts are invested so that Resolution number 1481 of the European Council is applied in Croatia, regarding international condemnation of the crimes of the Communist totalitarian regimes. The truth must come to light, so that we can successfully confront the historical falsehoods … that its heirs continue to write today, among whom is Vesna Pusić.[34]

Pusić was labeled an "old Communist Yugoslav agent."

Finally, they added that government support for Vesna Pusić's candidacy for the position of secretary-general of the United Nations must be

31 HRT, "Bleiburg – mjesto stradanja nevinih ili mjesto veličanja NDH," February 4, 2016, access April 15, 2018, http://www.hrt.hr/320601/vijesti/otvoreno-sabor-opet-pokrovitelj-bleiburga.

32 "Multitudinaria protesta en repudio a la negación del genocidio croata de Bleiburg", *Croacias Totales*, February 14, 2016

33 "Multitudinaria protesta en repudio a la negación del genocidio croata de Bleiburg.

34 Ante Srzić, "Vesna Pusić izjavom o Bleiburgu razbjesnila Hrvate u Argentini," *Tportal*, February 15, 2016, https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/vesna-pusic-izjavom-o-bleiburgu-razbjesnila-hrvate-u-argentini-20160215.

withdrawn, saying that they would also do everything possible to make her candidacy impossible, hoping that "the Croats will join us, both of the Homeland as well as of the whole world." The news was picked up and reported even by the Croatian mainstream media.[35] This reaction clearly demonstrates the aforementioned new us vs. them dichotomy and the need to reinforce themselves as guardians of the memory of Bleiburg, which is no longer underground, but still does not obtain worthy recognition in Croatia in the eyes of the Croatian diaspora in Argentina. The dichotomy between "us," the Croats in diaspora and "them," the Croats at home, is more exacerbated when the center-left coalition is in power, which the diaspora views as the descendants and heirs of Communists, their archenemy, and therefore those that they must defend the homeland from.

The kin-state-diaspora relations gained new momentum, especially with the newly formed office for the Croats abroad. The Croaticum program continues at the Universities of Zagreb and Split, giving a total of 250 scholarships for students of Croatian origin. From 2012 to 2021, the office approved a total of 1,836 scholarships for 1,388 students. In 2018/2019, enrollment quotas for diaspora members were introduced at Croatian universities.[36] *Glas Hrvatske* (The voice of Croatia), became a fully-fledged radio program and today airs TV programs with news in English and Spanish, as well as a website in both languages, and has become the main source of information for the diaspora members of the third and fourth generations since they do not speak Croatian. Thus, the international program of Croatian radio is in fact an information service for the diaspora and by the diaspora since the diaspora descendants/returnees work there and create content in line with their views.

In this new period, we observe the rising participation of second- and third-generation diaspora members/descendants in prominent positions and in politics. Vice Batarelo's case might be the most extreme(ist). He is currently the president of the Croatian ultra-Catholic organization Vigilare. Born in 1969 in Sydney, he returned to Croatia in 1990. From 1998 to 2010, he was the deputy director of Caritas Croatia, and then he became the head of the office of family pastoral care for the Croatian Archbishopric. He is one of the initiators of the civil society organization "In the name of the family," a Catholic activist organization that organized the gathering of signatures to introduce the definition of marriage as "a union between a man and a

35 Ante Srzić, "Vesna Pusić izjavom o Bleiburgu razbjesnila Hrvate u Argentini".

36 *Annual Report of the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad* (2021).

woman" in the Constitution in 2013, the object of the referendum where the majority of citizens voted in favor.[37]

There is also a member of the second-generation diaspora coming from Argentina—Davor Ivo Stier, grandson of Ivan Stier, the NDH colonel of the Ustaša Militia, a third-generation Argentinian Croat born in Buenos Aires in 1972. He "returned" to Croatia in 1996 upon invitation of the ministry of foreign affairs, where he worked as a professional diplomat, and he was also foreign policy adviser to two HDZ prime ministers, Ivo Sanader and Jadranka Kosor, until 2011. In 2011, he entered the Croatian Parliament as an HDZ MP. After Croatia joined the EU, he was an HDZ-elected member of the European Parliament from 2013 to 2016 while the HDZ was in opposition, and when the HDZ came back to power he became minister of foreign and European affairs and vice president of the government of Croatia from October 2016 to June 2017. He has later been the HDZ MP in the Croatian Parliament and an HDZ member of the European Parliament. Other prominent diaspora descendants and returnees in the Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs are Ambassador Zvonimir Frka Petešić from France, chief of staff to the current prime minister, Andrej Plenković. His father, an economic emigrant, was a close friend of Bruno Bušić.[38] Another descendant is Stjepo (Stephen Nikola) Bartulica from the US, also a former diplomat, who became foreign policy advisor of Prime Minister Tihomir Orešković (January to October 2017). Canadian Croat Zdravka Bušić, former chief of cabinet of president Tuđman, was appointed vice minister of foreign and European affairs in 2016 and then she was state secretary for political issues at the ministry until 2020, when she became an HDZ member of the Croatian Parliament.[39]

Another element pointing to the new rise of the diaspora is the establishment of diaspora organizations at home. The Center for Croatian Diaspora Research/Croatian Diaspora Congress was founded in 2014 with the aim "to promote, develop, support and improve better relations between Croats in the homeland and in emigration," with prolific academic and research activities that foster historical right-wing revisionism and whitewashing of the Ustaša regime and the violent and hostile diaspora activities in the Cold War period.[40] Its president, Marin Sopta, was a prominent member

37 Orhidea Gaura Hodak, "Tko je Vice Batarelo, čovjek koji je pokrenuo konzervativnu revoluciju u Hrvatskoj?," *Dnevno.hr*, May 29, 2013, https://www.dnevno.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/otkrivamo-tko-je-vice-batarelo-covjek-koji-je-pokrenuo-konzervativnu-revoluciju-u-hrvatskoj-87936/.

38 See chapter 6.

39 *Parlametar.hr*, https://parlametar.hr/zastupnica/844-zdravka-busic.

40 Centar za iseljeništvo, https://www.centar-za-iseljenistvo.hr/po%C4%8Detna-stranica/o-nama.

and president of the Croatian National Resistance in Canada before coming to Croatia in the 1990s.[41]

The most controversial momentum of the renewal of the diaspora relations and narrative was the opening of an integrated studies program in "demography and Croatian emigration" at the Faculty of Croatian Studies (founded in the 1990s) at the University of Zagreb in 2019 with the clear intention of rehabilitation of the Croatian political émigré community and historical revisionism, which caused a lot of controversy. Especially controversial was the course on "Croatian émigré dignitaries,"[42] where they taught through their activities the "Croatian idea of independence and unity, tragical destinies; sacrifice; prejudice and objective assessment; the role of the Croatian émigré dignitaries in emigration until Croatian independence; the role of the Croatian émigré dignitaries in the Homeland War; the carriers of the idea of new Croatian state."[43] The study program is still being taught.

Also, after the strategic goal of EU accession was achieved, which meant a low period in diaspora-kin state relations, Croatian state officials renewed visits to the diaspora, but the "planetary Croats" reacted differently, depending on which side of the ideological spectrum they were coming from. Prime Minister Milanović of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was the first statesman to visit Australia after twenty years in 2014 when he was publicly scourged. When he gave a lecture at the Monash University in Melbourne, a group of twenty Croats stood in front of the University with banners reading "Zoran Milanović is Croatia's Viktor Yanukovych," "You are not welcome," and "Go home," and waved NDH era flags.[44] One of the protesters attended his lecture and asked why he (allegedly) preferred Tito to Tuđman, claiming that it was the reason for protests. In a commentary in the Croatian right-wing news outlet dnevno.hr, Vice Batarelo, "Croatian activist born in Sydney," commented on Milanović's visit to the Macquarie University where before, "Croatian students … discussed and dreamed of Croatian independence. Some of us are living that dream, while others still have the right to dream of

41 Mate Bašić, "Stari novi 'čovik' Marin Sopta," *Dnevno.hr*, Oct 14, 2019, accessed on June 27, 2025, https://www.dnevno.hr/kolumnisti/mate-basic/stari-novi-covik-marin-sopta-1378242/.

42 Goran Borković, "Ustaški studiji," *Portal Novosti*, July 13, 2019; Goran Borković, "Ustaški velikani," *Portal Novosti*, August 18, 2019,

43 https://www.fhs.unizg.hr/predmet/hvui.

44 Gordan Žvanović, "Zoran Milanović u Melbourneu," *HRT*, Mar 13, 2014, accessed on June 29, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzE1sIKOuvk&ab_channel=CroatiaHit.

and love Croatia from afar."[45] He criticized Milanović for not "having guts nor the dignity" to visit Australian Croats, calling him a disgrace, and for not attending the derby match between two Croatian football teams, Melbourne and Sydney United, but instead going to the Hurstville Townhall, "where Chinese and Arabs live," since "Croatian football clubs transmitted dreams of independent Croatia and were the precursors of today's National Football Team."[46]

The reception in the diaspora was utterly different with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović's (HDZ) visit to Argentina (2018) and Canada (2019). In her electoral campaign, she claimed that she would go back to the HDZ roots and the path that was drawn by Franjo Tuđman, and she was the first Croatian president to visit Argentina after Tuđman. Her visit was very significant for the diaspora, too. On the occasion of her visit to Argentina in 2018, she honored distinguished Croatian emigration associations and members, mostly from the post-World War II émigré community, with presidential medals and decorations. For a special contribution to the promotion of Croatian heritage, language, culture, and education, as well as the development and reputation of the Republic of Croatia through the work and activities of the Croatian community in the Republic of Argentina, she awarded honorary consuls to Catalina Lonac, Dražen Antun Juraga (a member of the 1.5 generation), and Nikola Nakić, together with members of the émigré community Josip Puches, Tomislav Pavičić, and Arsen Petrošić.[47] She also posthumously awarded Brother Lino Pedišić with the medal of Danica Hrvatska with the image of Katarina Zrinska, for special merits in the establishment and operation of Croatian religious centers, "Alojzije Stepinac" and "St. Nikola Tavelić," for social care for members of the Croatian emigration in Argentina and the promotion of moral and social values.[48] She awarded the Charter of the Republic of Croatia for an exceptional and long-term contribution to the promotion of Croatian heritage, language, culture, education, science, and sports, strengthening economic cooperation, and preserving the Croatian identity

45 Vice Vincent J. Batarelo and Marcel Holjevac, "Komunist u zemlji ustaške emigracije. Milanović se u Australiji nije ponio kao državnik," *Dnevno.hr*, Mar 12, 2014, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.dnevno.hr/vijesti/komentari/milanovic-se-u-australiji-nije-ponio-kao-drzavnik-117379/.

46 Vice Vincent J. Batarelo and Marcel Holjevac, "Komunist u zemlji ustaške emigracije. Milanović se u Australiji nije ponio kao državnik".

47 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 26/2018, Decision, February 27, 2018, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_03_26_518.html.

48 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 26/2018, Decision, February 27, 2018, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_03_26_514.html.

in the Republic of Argentina, to the following associations: Croatian Home—Buenos Aires, Croatian Cultural Society of Mutual Aid Dock Sud, Croatian Association of Mutual Aid Villa Mugeta, Croatian Association "Croatian Dom" Comodoro Rivadavia—Chubut, Croatian Association "Istarski Korjeni"—La Plata—Berisso—Ensenada, Croatian Association "Naš Narod—Chaco, Argentine-Croatian Chamber of Economy, Mala Škola Croatian Language School—Buenos Aires, Instituto República De Croacia—Tucumán, Association "Jorgovan"—Dock Sud—Buenos Aires, Croatian Choir Jadran, Klapa B.A., Women's Klapa "Valovi," Association of Croatian Catholic University and High School Students (DHKSS),[49] as well as "for exceptional and long-term contribution to the promotion of Croatian heritage, language, education, culture and folklore, and the preservation of Croatian identity in the Argentine Republic", to the Croatian-Argentine Cultural Club (HAKK) and Croatian Cultural Center Rosario.[50] She finally awarded the Charter of the Republic of Croatia to religious associations Croatian Catholic Mission of St. Leopold Mandić—San Justo, Croatian Catholic Mission of St. Nikola Tavelić—Buenos Aires, Cardinal Stepinac, to Caritas Croatia "for selfless and exceptional contribution in the provision of social and spiritual care and for long-term pastoral activity among Croatian emigrants in the Republic of Argentina."[51] *Studia Croatica* was awarded the Charter of the Republic of Croatia in 2010 on its fiftieth anniversary.[52]

At the reception with diaspora members in Buenos Aires, she held a speech where she said that "after World War II many Croats in Argentina found freedom where they could testify their patriotism and stressed the justifiable motives for the freedom of the Croatian nation and homeland," also emphasizing that "Croats in Argentina shared the fate of their people even during the former Yugoslav Communist regime, which was bothered by any mention of the Croatian national name, flag and coat of arms, or confession of religion."[53] At the reception, the then president of the UACRA,

49 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 26/2018 Decision 27 February 2018 https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_03_26_529.html

50 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 26/2018, Decision February 27, 2018, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_03_26_531.html.

51 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 26/2018 Decision 27 February 2018 https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_03_26_530.html

52 Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, No. 82/2010 Decision June 1, 2010, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2010_07_82_2331.html.

53 *Jutarnji.hr*, "Poruka iz Buenos Airesa. Grabar Kitarović: 'Mnogi su Hrvati nakon Drugog svjetskog rata u Argentini našli prostor slobode u kojem su mogli svjedočiti svoje domoljublje!'" March 13, 2018.

Tomislav Frkovic, summarized the feelings of the diaspora, starting the speech by saying, "We are all proud and happy to belong to a nation that, after so many years of captivity, primarily thanks to the incredible courage and patriotism of its sons and the wise and skillful leadership of Dr. Tuđman, won its freedom, defeating its three main enemies in the national liberation war: Yugoslavia, Bolshevism and Great Serbian imperialism."[54] He stressed that they "don't live in Croatia, but [they] live FOR CROATIA," and requested the president to abolish the antifascist bases of the Croatian Constitution which,[55] according to him were not true, evaluating it as "an ideological preamble, which still divides the Croatian people into winners and losers, has no place in the Croatian Constitution," and "impeded the real reconciliation." He also protested, asking:

> How is it possible that the number of members of the Croatian Parliament representing Croats in emigration has been reduced from twelve to only three, especially considering that there are over two million Croats and their descendants (therefore potential Croatian citizens), without taking into account the latest wave of emigration? At the same time, Croatia is pampering the Serbian minority without demanding the same rights for the Croatian minority in Serbia. Their number of representatives in the Croatian Parliament is almost twice as high as the representatives of non-homeland Croats, although the number of members of the Serbian minority is more than ten times smaller.[56]

He stressed that the strong relations between the diaspora and the homeland were (intentionally) weakened from the death of Franjo Tuđman until Grabar-Kitarović was elected. They attributed the low phase of kin-state diaspora relations to the presidents Stjepan Mesić (2000–2010) and Ivo Josipović (2010–15), who were "original representatives of Yugoslav ideology," hoping that she would "with the help of homeland and out-of-homeland Croats bring back Croatia to the sovereigntist politics of Dr. Tuđman in the current circumstances." He finished the speech with "Thank you for not

54 "Pročitajte emotivan govor vođe argentinskih Hrvata upućen predsjednici Grabar-Kitarović," *Dnevno.hr*, March 14, 2018, accessed on June 29, 2025, https://7dnevno.hr/vijesti/svijet/procitajte-emotivan-govor-vode-argentinskih-hrvata-upucen-predsjednici-grabar-kitarovic/.
55 These were the decisions of the ZAVNOH (1943), the Constitution of the People's Republic of Croatia (1947), and the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (1963 and the 1990s).
56 "Pročitajte emotivan govor vođe argentinskih Hrvata upućen predsjednici Grabar-Kitarović," *Dnevno.hr*.

forgetting us! Convey to our brothers in the Homeland that we continue to love our beautiful Croatia despite the distance."[57]

Both Grabar Kitarović's and Frkovic's speeches were met with outrage by the media in Croatia, and also from Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. There were also analyses in the newspapers discussing who were the members of the diaspora that Grabar Kitarović met with and what the then leading people of the diaspora wrote or stated in public. Particularly problematic were Tomislav Frkovic and Mirko Hasenay, who two years earlier had sent an open letter to President Grabar-Kitarović where they also mentioned the antifascist basis of the Croatian constitution, stating:

> But the defense and defenders of the first modern Croatian state [the NDH] will sooner or later be recognized as a positive part of Croatian history, regardless of the current Constitution and its original foundations. Because history cannot be erased, although it is often, even now, written according to current needs. However, such history is not true history … Only the memory of the existence of the NDH and its brave defense kept the faith in the soul and heart of the Croatian people that sooner or later Croatia would regain its independence and become a normal national state. And if it had not been for the NDH, the fall of Communism in Croatia would not have led to independence, but only to a change of regime. But the liberation and the Homeland War happened because the Croatian people believed in the possibility of liberation, remembering that the Croatian state, at least for a short time, was achieved by their fathers and grandfathers. Finally, the irrefutable truth is that the same people who revolted against the NDH revolted against the new Croatian state.[58]

They also cited Franjo Tuđman to legitimize their claims: "The Independent State of Croatia was not only a fascist creation, but also an expression and aspiration of the will of the Croatian people for their freedom and independence."[59] So, they did recognize that the NDH was a fascist regime,

57 V.Ma, "Argentinski Hrvati nahvalili predsjednicu i zatražili brisanje Tita i ZAVNOH-a iz hrvatskog Ustava," *Tportal*, March 13, 2018, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/argentinski-hrvati-nahvalili-predsjednicu-i-zatrazili-brisanje-tita-i-zavnoh-a-iz-hrvatskog-ustava-foto-20180313.

58 M.M., "Hrvati Argentine: Mit o Jasenovcu treba zamijeniti istinom o Jasenovcu! Antifašizam je Hrvatima bio zločinački režim," *Hrsvijet.net*, April 19, 2016, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.hrsvijet.net/index.php/vijesti/132-hrvatska/42419-hrvati-iz-buenos-airesa-mit-o-jasenovcu-potrebno-je-zamjeniti-istinom-o-jasenovcu.

59 M.M., "Hrvati Argentine: Mit o Jasenovcu treba zamijeniti istinom o Jasenovcu!".

but for them it was praiseworthy because it was in the service of a higher cause, Croatian independence. And then they tried to equalize responsibility:

> It is completely correct to condemn the crimes of the Ustaša regime, but at the same time it is necessary to condemn the Communist and Great Serbian, that is, the anti-fascist crimes. It is an undeniable fact that Jasenovac existed even after 1945 and that it is also a 'shameful stain' for Tito's Yugoslavia due to the post-war crimes committed by Yugoslav Communists and Četniks .... The myth about Jasenovac must be replaced by the truth about Jasenovac, the full truth, whatever it may be, and we know that it is painful, because Jasenovac, like all such camps in Croatia, but also in Serbia, Germany, or anywhere, are immoral and disgusting phenomena that no one can be proud of.[60]

This is where the radical emigrated and homeland Croatia clashed, but to the further disillusionment to the emigrated Croatia. After Ante Jurić from Australia, Mirko Hasenay in Argentina was soon dismissed from the position of the representative of Argentina in the committee of Croats outside the Republic of Croatia by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad since his "activities and appearances within the Croatian community of Argentina as well as on social networks are related to the promotion of the undemocratic and totalitarian regime of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and such activities are in contradiction with the Constitutional provisions of the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian legislative framework."[61]

This was a huge blow to the community, especially since the HDZ was in power when it occurred. The far-right news portal *Kamenjar* found who to blame for the fact that "Croatian emigration was and remains 'enemy fascist emigration'... the man who once ironically identified himself as a guest and today, without even a hint of irony, behaves like a boss who decides everything by using his Croatian servants, political cowards."[62] They blamed Milorad Pupovac, representative of the Serbs in Croatia and president of Serbian National Council (Srpsko Narodno Vijeće—SNV), national coordination of the Serb community in Croatia. The main trigger according to *Kamenjar* was a piece published by the SNV newspaper *Novosti*,[63]

60 M.M., "Hrvati Argentine: Mit o Jasenovcu treba zamijeniti istinom o Jasenovcu!".

61 Dinko Dedić, "Tko ima zadnju riječ u Hrvatskoj?" *Projekt Velebit*, April 15, 2018, accessed June 29, 2025, https://kamenjar.com/tko-ima-zadnju-rijec-u-hrvatskoj/.

62 Dinko Dedić, "Tko ima zadnju riječ u Hrvatskoj?"

63 Hrvoje Šimičević, "Daleko je Argentina," *Portal Novosti*, March 29, 2018.

whose target "was Mirko Hasenay, the celebration of the establishment of the first modern Croatian state [the NDH] and automatically the entire emigration, which has no place in Pupovac's Croatia."[64]

This led to resorting to more radical political options that confirmed their narrative. So, they engaged in sharing the materials of the revisionist historians who claimed that Jasenovac was a camp three times—during the Ustaša era it was a forced labor camp, but it was also a camp for the Ustaša prisoners after 1945, and later even for the Tito's pro-Stalin opponents until 1951. This theory has been proven false by non-revisionist scholars.[65] And from social networks and their websites you can see that they also insist that it was not an extermination camp, but a labor camp where people were leading normal lives and even played football and sang in a choir.

While the extreme right in Croatia draws upon the information gotten from the diaspora materials from 1947–90, revisionism and information circulated in the opposite direction. And now the diaspora receives information from the revisionist historians and takes what is useful for them in a selective manner to confirm that their parents and grandparents were "real Croats who only loved Croatia profoundly and wanted it to be free." Two revisionists, Igor Vukić, journalist and general secretary of the association for the study of the triple camp Jasenovac, and Zdenko Kuftinec, Croatian military official, visited Argentina in April 2017, and got access to personal archives of some of the members of the Croatian community. They also gathered testimonies that would prove that Jasenovac was in fact only a labor camp during the NDH period. As transmitted in an article published in the Croatian far right web portal and written by a member of the second generation of the Croatian émigré community, they interviewed Zorka Rašić, daughter of an Ustaša official as a relevant witness who was twelve when she arrived in Jasenovac in 1942. "The conversation with a person like Zorka Rašić was extremely important. She once again confirmed my opinion that the camp in Jasenovac was a labor camp, in which there were no mass, serial murders," said Igor Vukić. "The visit of two historians from Zagreb thus created another bridge between exiled and homeland Croatia, in an effort for a realistic and objective presentation of sensitive topics from Croatian history," the reporter concluded, implying that there is some hidden truth to be discovered about sensitive topics, meaning the crimes and atrocities

64 Dinko Dedić, "Tko ima zadnju riječ u Hrvatskoj?"

65 Petar Bašić and Mario Kevo, "O problemu postojanja jasenovačkog logora nakon 1945," *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* 30, no. 1 (1997): 300–307.

of the NDH.[66] They were also guests on the Croatian radio program in Buenos Aires, *Croacias Totales*. In the interview, Vukić explained that Jasenovac was a "camp for NDH opponents," but that during Yugoslavia "it was described as a place of serial mass murders, that people were killed there in the most monstrous and bestial way."[67] He also stressed that there was a myth that 700,000 people died there, and that anyone who questioned this number suffered consequences such as losing a job or political pressure, such as in the case of Franjo Tuđman. He even claimed that Bruno Bušić, "Tuđman's colleague," was probably assassinated by the UDBA because he "wanted to investigate sensitive taboo topics from Croatian history." While he is right about the exaggerated number of 700,000, it was indeed a place of bestial mass murders.

Vukić reiterated the revisionist myth that Jasenovac "was a camp during World War II, but also after World War II, only now for prisoners of war, for home guards (*domobrani*), opponents of the Communist regime and the third stage was after the Tito and Stalin split, where Tito had *pro*-Stalinists imprisoned in Jasenovac, and then on the island of Goli." He even claimed that "there are some people who passed through Jasenovac, prisoners of the NDH, who later ended up on Goli, and they said that the island of Goli was a much harder prison for them than the time they spent in Jasenovac." Vukić also stated that "a group of Jews were interned in Jasenovac, under pressure from Germany, which unfortunately had an anti-Jewish policy that was at the core of the Nazi movement and which Croatia had to accept whether you wanted to or not, or to behave as they were dictated," so it was justified as a pressure from above, from Nazi Germany, relativizing or trying to diminish the agency of the NDH in exterminations.[68]

However, he also relativizes that information, stating that he found NDH documents that wanted to "resettle the Jews in Jasenovac to live there and wait for the end of the war, they did not intend to kill or abuse them … But by force of circumstances, the Germans did not allow this, but were dissatisfied with the mild policy of the NDH towards the Jews."[69] He states that the revisionist

66 "Tragom prošlosti: Igor Vukić u Argentini istražuje dokaze o Jasenovcu," *Max Portal*, April 27, 2017, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.maxportal.hr/premium-sadrzaj/tragom-proslosti-igor-vukic-u-argentini-po-dokaze-o-jasenovcu/.

67 Interview with Igor Vukić and Zdenko Kuftinec, *Croacias Totales Radio Program,* April 3, 2017, accessed June 29, 2025, https://soundcloud.com/croaciastotales/igor-vukic-i-zdenko-kuftinec-u-argentini-prvi-dio

68 Interview with Vukić and Kuftinec, *Croacias Totales Radio Program*.

69 For more about historical revisionism regarding the Jasenovac death camp, see Ivo Goldstein, *Povijesni revizionizam i neoustaštvo. Hrvatska 1989–2022.* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2023), 453–73.

historians don't get funding from state institutions but private donations, "because Jasenovac camp is a special topic because all these years it served as an ideological sword, an ideological stick that was used to try to disable any idea of Croatian independence. Because whenever the idea of statehood appeared, then the rulers from the south [alluding to Serbia] would bring up the subject of Jasenovac again and falsely warn that if Croatia becomes independent, Jasenovac will open again, where people will be killed en masse," concluding that, "Now it is important to show how false that myth was and how much it was inflated, turned into a means of ideological pressure and actually has nothing to do with what was really happening there."[70]

Vukić concludes that "dictatorships fall, but their myths remain and live on, especially this myth in which enormous amount of money, energy and diplomatic resources was invested, and books were printed to justify this mythology. It will take a long time before people start to accept it, because unfortunately many people learned it in school and memorized it." Kuftinec also confirmed their narrative, stating that the first goal was to achieve an independent Croatian state, and then that they "were suffocating in the alliance with Germany and Italy, they had no other choice but to accept them as role models." He also says, "It is easier to understand the Homeland War if you know World War II—everything is connected, obviously that war didn't end in 1945, and it looks like the Homeland War hasn't ended yet either." So, in line with the diaspora narrative, the Homeland War is a continuation of World War II and we are in a state of perpetual war and we should never be caught off guard, as the fight is not over.

Finally, Vukić and Kuftinec were asked about Dinko Šakić. Vukić said that the purpose of the case of Dinko Šakić was "to remove Jasenovac from the agenda, too early. Šakić was convicted even though his defense tried to bring up the things that I am saying today. Unfortunately, the general atmosphere in society was such that he had to be convicted for Croatia and Tuđman to show the EU, America, Israel that this is how they put things … Some believe that this procedure should be revised and rehabilitated … we hope that our work would lead to the annulment of such a verdict because it is about the fact that he certainly did not deserve such a punishment."[71] So, while they acknowledge that Šakić was tried by Croatian courts, they relativize the trial and re-signify it as yet another sacrifice for the recognition by the international powers, and the fact that he was found guilty is justified by a higher interest, while sowing a seed of doubt regarding the legitimacy of the

70 Interview with Vukić and Kuftinec, *Croacias Totales Radio Program*.
71 Interview with Vukić and Kuftinec, *Croacias Totales Radio Program*.

verdict and even stating that he deserves to be rehabilitated. The comments by Vukić and Kuftinec are followed by the Argentinian Croats present in the studio approving, stating "That is right," "Exactly," etc., meaning that they finally found someone who understands them and confirms their story and eliminates the uncomfortable parts.

In November 2023, Zlatko Hasanbegović, revisionist historian, former Croatian minister of culture and then member of parliament of the far right group Bloc for Croatia – Homeland Movement also went to Argentina to collect and transfer archival material to Croatia.[72] He went there with Amir Obhođaš, assistant director for the protection of archival materials of the Croatian State Archives, and spent two weeks in Buenos Aires in order to collect and retrieve archival materials of associations and organizations and prominent individuals created mainly during the Independent State of Croatia and after its collapse. The negotiations regarding the acquisition of the material began in 2015, "and as many as 800 boxes containing about 84 meters of valuable material were collected. Among other things, the material refers to the functioning of the HOP."[73] During their visit, they were received by the Croatian Argentinian Home, San Telmo, led by Mirko Hasenay ("Lo de Mirko Cocina Casera").[74] Photos show Hasanbegović and Obhođaš with Hasenay in the yard with an NDH-era coat of arms painted between two years, 1941 and 1991, on the yard wall.[75] After returning to Croatia, Hasanbegović and Obhođaš stated that, "it was not possible to organize transport to Croatia, so only a small part was brought, the negatives of the photographer Frajtić," but that it is definitely national heritage.[76] Although returning these newly discovered private archives to Croatia where they definitely belong is necessary, and making them publicly available represents an added value, the likelihood that these archival sources will be groundbreaking is very small. They will more likely clarify some nuances of the relations between the diaspora members and organizations. However, to this day (January 2026), the above-mentioned archival material has not been brought to Croatia.

72 "Hasanbegović odlazi u Argentinu," *Nezavisne novine*, November 20, 2023, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/ex-yu/Hasanbegovic-odlazi-u-Argentinu/800923.

73 Goran Penić, "Kako su zapravo živjele ustaše nakon poraza! Hasanbegović: 'Ovo je nacionalno dobro,'" *Jutarnji list*, December 18, 2023, 9.

74 Facebook profile Lo De Mirko Cocina Casera, December 4, 2023, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=921186549378527&set=pcb.921186656045183.

75 Facebook profile Lo De Mirko Cocina Casera, June 27 2023, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=822373442593172&set=pb.100044615721432.-2207520000&type=3.

76 Goran Penić, "Kako su zapravo živjele ustaše nakon poraza!".

The NDH Narrative Strikes Back

In May 2024 there was a government change in Croatia when the HDZ formed a coalition with the far-right Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret—DP). DP members come from diaspora parties such as the HRS, but also from diaspora returnees, among others the before-mentioned Stjepo Bartulica. Their rhetoric derives from and reiterates that of the Croat émigré community abroad, and the DP's discourse significantly overlaps with the writings of the émigrés in exile. However, the HDZ still won the majority of the votes in the diaspora constituency, 80 percent.[77] One of the main criticisms of the DP towards its now senior coalition partner, the HDZ, was that they did not entice the emigrated Croatians to return. The DP would give incentives, and one of the coalition conditions was to create a Ministry of Demographics and Immigration with the aim to attract Croatian returnees from Europe, but also from South America and centers for returnees worldwide. Whether this measure is viable and whether there are any Croatian descendants willing to return to Croatia is yet to be seen. While the Croatian political émigré community is getting smaller abroad, their narrative spilled over in the democratic Republic of Croatia and with oscillations gained prominence in the public space. And now there is a portion of the government coalition that openly legitimizes their narrative, while the HDZ at times ignores and at times tolerates and even flirts with their narrative to maintain power and appease its own most radical faction or to compete with the DP for voters, a pattern we can observe in many European countries where conservative parties compete with far-right populists.

It is therefore unsurprising that, under the ruling coalition's stance, diaspora-driven narratives and historical revisionism reached their height in July 2025, culminating in a massive concert in Zagreb by Marko Perković Thompson, the far-right nationalist singer. Before an audience of half a million, many dressed in black shirts, berets, and symbols reminiscent of the NDH era, Thompson took the stage. Seeking to capitalize on his popularity, Prime Minister Andrej Plenković (HDZ) and his children posed for photographs with Thompson ahead of the concert. The event's climax came when Thompson shouted the Ustaša salute, "For the Homeland!" to

77 State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia, Croatian Parliament final election results 2024, April 2024, https://www.izbori.hr/site/UserDocsImages/2024/Izbori_za_zastupnike_u_Hrvatski_sabor/Rezultati/Sabor%202024.%20Kona%C4%8Dni%20rezultati%20izbora.pdf.

which the ecstatic crowd roared back, "Ready!" Croatia's defense minister, Ivan Anušić (HDZ), who attended the concert, later admitted to joining in the salute.[78] This moment marked a decisive turning point in the normalization of the Ustaša narrative, signaling its full return to Croatia. More troublingly, it emboldened a political push to restrict artistic expression and free speech, especially against anything labeled "anti-Croat." At the forefront of this campaign stand Homeland War veterans, who increasingly cast themselves as arbiters of what is "worthy" or authentically "Croat."

As a result, a wave of threats against journalists, writers, and intellectuals has begun, while veterans' associations have successfully pressured authorities to ban concerts by Serbian singers in Croatia, as well as two festivals to date: *Nosi se* in the town of Benkovac, and *Oglede* in Velika Gorica on the outskirts of Zagreb. They also sought to shut down the Šibenik Festival of Alternative and Left (FALIŠ), but failed after some veterans voiced support for the event.[79] On September 17, during protests against a planned concert in Dugo Selo by Serbian rock musician Momčilo Bajagić Bajaga, one veteran openly declared that "Thompson's concert was a trigger to wake up" and to make their voices heard.[80] This stance was effectively legitimized by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Veterans' Affairs Tomo Medved, who stated that veterans "should be consulted when organizing festivals."[81] While these recent events confirm the findings presented in this volume, the conclusion raises an open question: will the ruling coalition's main party be able to contain extremist and nationalist currents, ensuring they represent only a temporary surge? Or has the (neo-)Ustaša genie already escaped the bottle in Croatia?

78 Joe Orovic, "A Singer's Fascist-Era Salute Evokes a Bloody Time in Croatia," *New York Times*, August 24, 2025.

79 Ana Petrić, "Branitelji prosvjedovali protiv festivala 'Fališ' u Šibeniku," *Jutarnji list*, September 7, 2025.

80 Ronald Goršić, "Prosvjed udruga branitelja protiv koncerta Momčila Bajagića Bajage u Dugom Selu," *YouTube*, September 17, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8pZRo8Du5Y.

81 "Initiative For a Free Croatia: More Than 1,200 Citizens and 175 Organisations Call on the Government to Put an End to Bans on Festivals and Concerts," *Gong.hr*, September 19, 2025, https://gong.hr/en/2025/09/19/initiative-for-a-free-croatia-more-than-1200-citizens-and-175-organisations-call-on-the-government-to-put-an-end-to-bans-on-festivals-and-concerts/.

Epilogue and Conclusions

Abstract: The book concludes with an epilogue on the diaspora's memory pitfalls and how collective memory serves as a tool for the preservation of identity, but also on how memory itself, although almost without conflicts inside a community, is not carved in stone and undergoes several reconfigurations. The research on the diaspora's commemorations of events from both wars (WWII and the war in Croatia, 1991–95) shows similarities with today's Croatia, where politics of remembrance continue to surround and define the state. The book also draws conclusions on the leverage of the Croatian diaspora during the Yugoslav era and their current role and influence on the nationalist parties in modern Croatia that manipulate and instrumentalize traumas from the recent past for their narrow interests.

Keywords: afterword, memory reconfigurations, counter-memory, current role, modern Croatia

The trauma of defeat, the Bleiburg postwar killings, and the exile served as a unifying force for the Croatian post-World War II diaspora in Argentina, allowing them to develop a sense of privilege, in Todorov's terms, by belonging to the disfavored group to shape a specific identity.[1] In order to overcome uncertainty and restore order after this trauma, they became "centred around disingenuous inside/outside dichotomies, becoming an endogamous community."[2] At the same time, the trauma became the social panorama through which they "defined and redefined their place in the world, thus the memory of the trauma began to form part of the core values, rules and central expectations of the community."[3] This strengthens and

1 Tsvetan Todorov, *Los abusos de la memoria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2000), 54.

2 Emma Hutchison, "Trauma and the Politics of Emotions: Constituting Identity, Security and Community after the Bali Bombing," *International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2010): 65–86, 82.

3 Piotr Sztompka, "Cultural Trauma the Other Face of Social Change," *European Journal of Social Theory* 3, no. 4 (2000): 449–66, 457.

Židek, Nikolina. *The Croatian Diaspora in Argentina: From Martyrs to Memory Guardians*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press / Central European University Press, 2026.
DOI 10.5117/9789633867556-9

increases the degree of identification with the group, which causes them to deny and justify "bad behaviour" of the group towards an external group, adopting a defensive reaction.[4] To tackle the trauma, they preserved the remembrance of the traumatic moment and constructed their identity around it. This identity, inextricably linked with memory, was passed on to later generations through their upbringing in such a way that they lived the memory as if it were their own, thus reinforcing a feeling of belonging to a community by sharing an identity rooted in traumatic history. This is a case where there is no conflict of memories because the conflictive memory was on the other side of the ocean, in the country that they were forced to leave, consequently shaping a monolithic underground memory on their side of the Atlantic. However, once established, this narrative was not crystalized forever. Although preserved through generations, the memory was inevitably reorganized and reinterpreted by the new generations, while also being influenced by the reality of the society found in their locale.

The 1.5 generation bridges the experience of witnesses or survivors and the post-memory generation in how they were marked by their own trauma and by the trauma of their community. Together with the second generation, they are "the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history or into myth."[5] When the dream of a sovereign Croatia came true, they aligned it with their situation and mission in order to perpetrate their identity as "the guardians of the truth," and "the real Croats" who know how Croatia should be guided and led, while preserving the old dates and giving them meaning through the new ones. They are the carriers of a message and a legacy. This was even more exacerbated when the events whose memory they preserved for so long, especially the memory of Bleiburg, did not get the treatment they thought it deserved in the new millennium.

The third, new post-memory generation has a tendency to both cumulative heroization and victimization: while perceiving themselves as long-term victims of Tito's Yugoslavia because of being born in Argentina and framing their grandfathers' participation in World War II as acts of patriotism and fights for freedom, the 1990s Homeland War is framed as the new war of liberation, a continuation of their grandfathers' World War II struggle for the ideal of a sovereign and independent Croatia against Serbian occupation. Commemorations of events and processes in the past acquire meaning

4 Bertjan Doosje et al., "Guilty by Association: When One's Group Has a Negative History," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 4 (1998): 872–86.

5 Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books USA, 2009), XV.

when linked to the future. Since the regular repetition of commemorations allows us to observe how memory is interpreted from the present moment, we witness a two-way process: they interpret World War II from the present, instrumental to their identity based on singularity. On the other hand, they interpret the present homeland celebrations from the past, from the events that marked them as a post-memory generation, so they could fit them into their narrative. The post-memory generation framed new celebrations and reframed the old ones to create a coherent narrative that serves to reinforce their identity as Croats and enables them to re-signify their community history, while maintaining their sense of uniqueness towards both their "destination" country (Argentina, where they were born) and their country of "origin" (Croatia, the country their grandparents were forced to leave).

The preservation of collective memory of the Croatian post-World War II diaspora has been carried out for almost eight decades, tens of thousands of miles away from the site where the trauma happened—in their homeland. As Jelin says in response to the question about what happens when memory cannot materialize in a specific place:

> When their initiatives are blocked by opposing social forces or by state actions, the subjectivity, the desire and will of the women and men who fight to materialize their memories are strengthened and they seek new channels and new ways to commemorate. In some sense, it can be said that there is no rest, because the memory has not been "deposited" anywhere; it remains in people's minds and feelings. The effort to transform personal feelings—unique and difficult to transfer—into collective public meanings remains open and remains active. Is it possible to destroy something that human groups try to remember or perpetuate? Could it not be that the silence and oblivion sought by repressing commemorations and marks have the paradoxical effect of multiplying memories by keeping open and active questions and public debate about the past?[6]

In the absence of a physical space, "not the only territory where memory actions are deployed,"[7] they found surrogate materialities, different tools and instruments to sustain it. The main instrument was by creating a Croatian microcosm in exile relying on the pillars such as the church, political parties, educational, cultural, and social institutions, and endogamous marriages.

6 Elizabeth Jelin, *La lucha por el pasado. Cómo construimos la memoria social* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2017, Kindle edition), loc. 2507.

7 Jelin, *La lucha por el pasado*, loc. 2553.

The preservation of identity and language through education and cultural and religious activities have been maintained to this day and until the third and fourth generation, which in turn serve as tools to strengthen the bond with the homeland and their identity as Croats, born in Argentina as a consequence of the exile whose long martyrdom began with Bleiburg. Likewise, trauma is perpetuated at the community and family level with the transmission of memory through the aforementioned tools and materialities, but also through other marks—giving children and grandchildren the names of relatives who disappeared in Bleiburg. Thus, indelible traces are created in subsequent generations since they carry the legacy of their ancestors. This force of trauma is reflected in the case of the forestry engineer Ivica Frković, who named two lagoons Jasna and Mirna, after his daughters who died in the postwar killings collectively labeled as Bleiburg, while his grandson, Tomislav Frkovic, named his daughter Jasna.

Another fact from the family environment was observed during the interviews. The marks are logically not found in public spaces, but in the homes of the members of the community, saturated with memory, which was passed on to the post-memory generation. The houses of the members of the diaspora are full of memories: souvenirs, patriotic symbols (from the NDH era), and photographs of both the relatives murdered in Bleiburg, as well as the commemorations and patriotic celebrations since the arrival in Argentina in 1947, being reminders of the imperative to preserve memory. The first generation found the materiality in their own stories and in their political work for the recognition of their suffering on the one hand, and an independent Croatia on the other. In the first period, while the first generation had the sole undertaking of commemorations in its hands, the materiality is also reflected in journals and books as places of memory, a kind of portable archive to which the next generations can cling, a legacy for the future. Further material is found in the organization and rituality of the commemorations themselves, which are preserved today. With the death of the first generation and the protagonism of the post-memory generation, new materialities are needed, their own—which enter into dialogue with memory and local territorial marks as places of commemoration significant for local history, ways of commemorating, and symbols and slogans—as well as virtual spaces and new technologies that serve as a new substitute materiality

As we have seen, and as Jelin already said, memory can be maintained without territorial marks, without visiting the places of the events or other symbolic spaces, without monuments or memorials. But in that case, it depends on the transmission of memory that is based on a homogeneous

story, although not carved in stone. On the other hand, its transmission within a diasporic and endogamous community, in the absence of its own materialities, needs to resort to the local marks where it was established and the new virtual realities.

To create a coherent narrative, a lot has had to be polished, silenced, and left behind—Penelope's task, as Valensi called it: "the reinterpretation of the past is a work to be redone constantly, which ensures the continuity of the house of Odysseus by undoing the work done the day before."[8] Among the seven types of forgetting identified by Connerton we can find a process of prescriptive forgetting as well as forgetting constitutive of a formation of a new identity.[9] So, what did they have to forget to create a coherent and both victimizing and romanticized narrative? I will exemplify with some writings from diaspora authors, although it has already been widely shown throughout the book. After that I will contrast them with a few dissonant voices from the diaspora itself that were being silenced or ignored.

First of all, the crimes and the nature of the Ustaša regime during World War II were almost completely erased. They constantly repeat(ed) that the primary goal was the establishment of an independent Croatian state and that once they proclaimed it, they were forced to accept fascism and Nazism because they were pressured by the only ones who recognized it, Italy and Germany, and that by no means can the NDH be considered a fascist regime. As Crljen stated in his speech in 1994:

> The enemies of the Ustaša Movement saw its very existence as a guilt for the creation of the Croatian state, while others condemned its proclamation; some wanted to blame Poglavnik because of his bad choice of allies, others again blamed the ideological bloc, for which the young country decided, others blamed bad strategists or immature generals. The worst were those who accepted both the state and its regime, the head of the state and his ministers with open arms, only to, at an opportune moment, throw it all together into the dustbin of history and dive into the fantasy of an unrealizable future, not even suspecting that heroes are already emerging in the land of Croats.[10]

8 Lucette Valensi, "Autores de la memoria, guardianes del recuerdo, medios nemotécnicos. Cómo perdura el recuerdo de los grandes acontecimientos," *Ayer* 32 (1998): 57–68, 68.

9 Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59–71. Connerton states that there are "at least seven types of forgetting": repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, forgetting as planned obsolescence, and forgetting as humiliated silence.

10 Daniel Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu* (Buenos Aires: UACRA, 1994), 16.

Extermination camps for Serbs, Jews, and Roma, especially Jasenovac, were ignored to the extent possible, or later downplayed as labor camps, or again delegated to the responsibility of the Third Reich. Kazimir Katalinić, member of the first generation of the Croatian political émigré community who lived well into the twenty-first century, in his book re-signifies Operation April 10—or, as it was called by the Yugoslav intelligence services, Operation Gvardijan—and calls it "Operation Jasenovac" or "Operation Black Legend."[11] According to Katalinić, the so-called "Operation Jasenovac, was carried out not only throughout the existence of the former Yugoslavia, but also in the times of the Republic of Croatia, within and out of its borders," and its final purpose was "to cement our chains and glorify Jugoslavia." Katalinić claims that the "operation" consisted in forcing Ljubo Miloš, one of the Kavran group members and former commander of the Jasenovac camp, to "amplify as much the horrors of Jasenovac, so that every Croat would not only condemn the Ustaša regime, but also the Croatian state, and ultimately come to the conclusion that we do not deserve to have a state of our own."[12] He also calls it the "Black Legend," referring to the historical term *La leyenda negra*, used by the Spanish European rivals to denigrate the Spanish Empire and its colonization of the Americas, emphasizing its atrocities, while downplaying or ignoring the similar deeds by other colonial powers. Thus, Katalinić states that the main purpose of the trial against the Kavran group was "'Operation Jasenovac,' whose aim was to create a black legend about the Croats in order to obstruct the then and the future Croatian struggle for its own state, and to strengthen the concept of a necessity of a Great-Serbian domination within Yugoslavia, as an inevitable and necessary guarantee of its integrity and holding 'genocidal Croats' under control."[13]

This specific topic contradicts their post-memory and shatters their foundational myth of a community exclusively of victims of Communist prosecution and postwar killings. Therefore, the post-memory generation invested a lot of effort to promote a different version, implying that the Ustaša concentration camp was not as bad as historical accounts have suggested and insisting on the false allegations that it was a post-World War II prison camp for Ustaša prisoners after the war. The responsibility for the defeat of the NDH was widely discussed by the first generation, but those who were not the survivors or the direct participants of the events,

11 Kazimir Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede: Povijest hrvatske političke emigracije 1945–1990*, 3 vols. (Zagreb: Naklada Trpimir, 2017), Vol.1, 69.

12 Kazimir Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede*, 69.

13 Katalinić, *Od poraza do pobjede*, Vol. 1, 76.

the subsequent generations, turned towards the external culprits, (Serb-Communist) Yugoslavia and the West. This is confirmed by the participant of the Bleiburg negotiations, Colonel Crljen who stated: "Our generals, whether Ustaša, whether Home Guards, were taken to Belgrade where they were sentenced to death, because for the military enemies of Serbia there could be no other punishment. The captured multitude of Croatian soldiers and a good portion of civilian refugees were put into prisoners' columns and were exposed to systematic massacres, during an interminable Way of the Cross that was filling abysmal pits such as Jazovka. Those who survived, paid with tens of years of prison for the unforgivable crime: being born as Croats."[14] The different routes and times of "exodus" were also forgotten—the fact that the high officials already evacuated their families on Christmas 1944 and had different paths, that they took the gold and kept it for themselves. Those who passed through Fermo also forgot about the uncomfortable parts of their lives in the refugee camp and everything that did not fit into the idealized and romanticized picture of "il piccolo stato croato," supposedly envied by everyone, that there were those who lived well-off in the camp, either by being in charge or charging a lot of money to other inmates for their services, as well as those who resorted to smuggling and prostitution to survive.

The 1.5 generation was particularly affected because they had to grow up fast and take on responsibilities that did not correspond with them as children and take care of their parents who never fully integrated in the society. They felt particularly uprooted and forced to be instrumental in the preservation of the community through endogamic marriages. The fact that they were born into a Croatian (exile) community influenced their lives and they were affected by their parents' decisions, although conditioned by extreme circumstances. The traumatic experience is a strong mark on the 1.5 generation that shaped their lives. In an attempt to reconcile their community history and make sense of their (personal and family) suffering, they justify the reason for their parents' struggle, without critically questioning their parents or their role in World War II.

The unequal start in Argentina due to the lack of assets for most was also not questioned. The political disunity of the Croatian diaspora not only at the worldwide level but in Argentina itself was also disregarded in the subsequent generations, as were the effects of the HOP split in the 1960s that meant a split in the community. The diaspora activities were described as anti-Communist and therefore democratic and justified with the yearning

14 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 16.

for a Croatian independent state. But they were not just writing articles and announcements in the newspapers or organizing peaceful gatherings and commemorations. They were also sabotaging and attacking the enemy and engaging in political violence worldwide against Yugoslav institutions.

The diaspora's concept and idea of Croatness is also incoherent because they always denied the title of Croat to anyone who was against the NDH. According to their memory, only Croats were killed in the postwar killings because they wanted an independent state, while there were also other groups—units of the Third Reich, Slovene Home Defenders, and members of various Serbian and Montenegrin Četnik units. In fact, at Bleiburg commemorations there were always representatives of the so-called oppressed nations from Eastern Europe, but never Slovenes—who were also the victims of the post-World War II killings by Yugoslavia—called *povojni pogumi*, because their presence at commemorations would question the narrative of the Croatian émigrés being killed because of being Croats.

In his memories about the Bleiburg field's failed negotiations, Crljen states that there was a representative of the Montenegrin Četniks. On the other hand, although he claims that the NDH generals were tried for "unforgivable crimes: being born as Croats," just a page earlier he states that "the defeat of NDH was confirmed with the agreement between Tito and Šubašić, creating a hybrid royal-Communist Yugoslav government under the English sponsorship and protectorate. Bitter irony of destiny wanted that both signatories of the Yugoslav agreement, Communist dictator Tito and Croatian *ban* (governor) Šubašić are of Croatian origin."[15] There was a generally accepted claim that those who were in exile were Croats, while the Communist authorities in Yugoslavia were Serb-Communist, but the political parties led by Luburić and Jelić suggested a reconciliation among Croatian Ustaša and Partisans/Communists, thus again recognizing that the ethnic identity did not overlap with the ideological one—all Croats being Ustaša and all Serbs being Partisans. Well until the 1970s they thought that they would go back and reestablish an independent Croatian state, but they realized that that was impossible without the Croats in the homeland, and eventually in the 1980s supported Franjo Tuđman, a former Partisan general, labeling him as "a Croat who opened his eyes."[16]

15 Crljen, *Istina o Bleiburgu*, 5.

16 Jakov Žižić, "'Hrvat je, koji je otvorio oči': Emigrantski intelektualci i političari o Franji Tuđmanu na stranicama časopisa Hrvatska revija," in *Međunarodni znanstveni skup Dijasporski i nacionalno manjinski identiteti: migracije, kultura, granice države*, ed. Marina Perić Kaselj and Filip Škiljan (Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti, 2018).

Finally, in the 1990s they went back to a free and independent Croatia, their dream come true, and they were not greeted with enthusiasm and joy. They ascribed that to the Croats who had stayed in Yugoslavia who were not "real Croats," but were brainwashed and indoctrinated. The Croatia that they dreamt of did not exist and this was a terrible disillusionment but served them again for the purpose of their community identity—to be the community of victims, of persecution, and the chosen ones who can never be fully understood. Thus, they perfectly fulfilled all the elements of Safran's definition of the diaspora's characteristics listed in the introduction.[17]

Memories That Lie a Bit

In line with the aforementioned, Sinovčić concludes his booklet on the contribution of Croats from Argentina: "And I will end, full of human and Croatian pride, with one irrefutable statement: no matter how much they were slandered and denigrated, no matter how much they were called the worst names; as much as they were portrayed 'in words and pictures' as born murderers, the Croats in Argentina did not commit a single (mis)deed that we here and our blood brothers in the homeland or anywhere on the globe should be ashamed of!"[18] The "irrefutable" narrative of purity of the political émigré community was shaken at several points. The first was when Pavelić and the Ustaša, who were participating in the ALN, were accused of burning churches around Buenos Aires in 1955, questioning their faith and strong ties with the Catholic church. The narrative of innocence was questioned even more in 1957 after an assassination attempt on Pavelić when there was an intensive media campaign for his extradition, and they inevitably had to read about the Ustaša crimes, although they again attributed it to a Yugoslav Communist campaign. This made Pavelić flee to Spain out of fear of extradition for war crimes, which was again a hard blow for the community.

In the 1990s, it was all behind them, and in their view they achieved an independent Croatian Republic and they thought that everything was perfect; but then the declassification of archives related to the Nazi arrival in Argentina started, and not only Nazi Germans were subject to scrutiny. When in 1993 Ivo Rojnica was not appointed ambassador of the Republic of

17 William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99.

18 Marko Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi: pregled hrvatskog tiska objavljenog u Argentini od 1946 do 1990* (Buenos Aires: self-published, 1991), 64.

Croatia due to the suspicion of war crimes, they accepted it with reticence, justifying it with the need to not create any problems for the newly (re) created independent Croatian state. Dinko Šakić also stated that he did not go to Croatia in order to not create problems for Franjo Tuđman because the international community would criticize him for being an alleged war criminal walking around Zagreb, as said in the *Magazin* interview in 1995.[19] But when Dinko Šakić was arrested in 1998 and extradited to and tried in Croatia under Franjo Tuđman, not Yugoslavia, this was a bitter pill to swallow. They again saw it as a necessary evil, another sacrifice for the benefit of the homeland, and something that was required from Tuđman by the foreign powers.

There were some dissonant voices that opposed such an idealizing and romanticized narrative, few openly and directly, and more through indirect and generalized criticisms, allusions, or by applying whataboutism, the strategy of responding to an accusation by making a counteraccusation. Among the few who were direct and open about the atrocities committed by the Ustaša regime was Eugen Dido Kvaternik,[20] who stated that "it is a notorious fact that we cannot deny that during the last war from the Croatian side grave incidents were committed, which from the moral standpoint constitute a sin, from the legal standpoint constitute a crime, and from the political are madness."[21] He blamed Luburić, the Ustaša camps commander, for the atrocities and stated that "in June 1942 I realized that things were occurring in the (Jasenovac) camp that could not be justified," and therefore suggested Pavelić to send Luburić to Slovakia and to reorganize the camp, which Pavelić refused. "Without success. Two months later I drew the attention to Dr. Pavelić to the necessity of closing the camp, that had already become a public scandal and a real national disgrace. The answer was always the same: 'The camp is a national necessity.'"[22] Kvaternik ended in Slovakia in 1943. Although Kvaternik undoubtedly knew about the crimes before June 1942, and, while detaching from responsibility for the crimes,

19 Aleksa Crnjaković, "Dinko Šakić, Upravitelj Jasenovca Dinko Šakić: Obavljao sam svoju dužnost" *Magazin*, No. 8, February 1995.

20 Eugen Dido Kvaternik, member of the first Ustaša emigration, was one of the organizers of the assassination plot on King Alexander in Marseilles in 1934. He was NDH chief of security in 1941–42, and split with Pavelić in October 1942. He went into exile in Slovakia until the end of World War II and, after passing through Austria, emigrated to Argentina where he was killed in a car accident in 1962. Zdravko Dizdar et al., eds., *Tko je tko u NDH: Hrvatska 1941.-1945* (Zagreb: Minerva, 1997), 224–25.

21 Eugen Dido Kvaternik, *Sjećanja i zapažanja: 1924–1945: Prilozi za hrvatsku povijest* (Zagreb: Naklada "Starčević," 1995), 143.

22 Kvaternik, *Sjećanja i zapažanja*, 146.

he is the only Ustaša official who explicitly stated that the Ustaša regime committed crimes at Jasenovac and condemned them.

Vinko Nikolić, an intellectual and editor in chief of the mainstream journal *Hrvatska revija*, exemplifies the statements that do not use any names and apply the whataboutism strategy:

> There is a pressing need for us to have our say about the events of the war. We left it to the partisans, who have been speaking and writing the most disgusting things about us Croats for twenty years. *I am not defending any crime*, but I am conscious, as a Croat and a man, when I say that they really have nothing to reproach us with. All our crimes, which as a Croat and a human being I deplore, they far surpassed. Well, *let's leave it now, but I emphasize the need for us to finally have our say, to present our experiences, our sufferings, to confess our sins and delusions, even crimes*, and from them, so many wonderful Croatian idealists who infinitely loved their homeland would rise above them even more brilliantly.[23]

Kvaternik broke the ties with the NDH leadership during World War II already, but also ended in Argentina and continued to live disconnected from the community. I interviewed his son, who said:

> My father saw Pavelić once on the subway. As soon as he saw him on the train, he got out. For my father it was a closed chapter. He wrote for *Hrvatska revija*. We had contact with some of my parents' Croatian friends, but we did not have a community life. There was a break between the past and the present. My father was the biggest critic of Pavelić. One of the few Ustaša leaders who regretted that we did everything bad, my grandfather, too.[24] It is a source of pride for me. My father wrote that he was sorry for the atrocities that he committed,[25] my grandfather, too, that was not what he wanted.[26]

When asked about the reaction of his family to his grandfather's execution in Tito's Yugoslavia in 1947, he stated: "We saw it as *sudbina* (destiny). If my father or my grandfather had arrested Tito, they would have shot him, too.

23 Vinko Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 2 vols. (Munich: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1967), 280.

24 His grandfather Slavko Kvaternik proclaimed the establishment of the NDH on April 10, 1941 on Zagreb Radio.

25 Referring to his articles for *Hrvatska revija* (Croatian review).

26 Interview with S.E.K. (born in 1942), November, 2017.

These are the laws of the war. If you are a revolutionary, you must accept that you can lose."[27] He did not portray his family as victims for being Croat or patriots, but as those who took over their ancestors' responsibility for revolutionary activities. It is also necessary to say that the interviewee was a political science university professor, so apart from his different family path, his profession may have determined his more objective position.

One of the things that I heard in an interview with members of the 1.5 generation was that sometimes "they" (we don't know who "they" are) would shout at them and they thought that they were telling them *kolači* (sweets), while it was in fact *koljači* (butcherers).[28] And the diaspora children did not understand why they were insulting them. Another interviewee, son of a high NDH official, when asked about the commemoration of the establishment of the NDH even today said that "10 April was a cry for freedom, and *we can discuss what happened later*, but the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia was an expression of centuries old wish of Croats to have their own state."[29] Another, second generation member, when asked about the reason why they keep celebrating April 10, also said that "it was a cry for freedom, *beyond what happened later and what Pavelić did*."[30] They did not clarify what happened later or what Pavelić did, but from these slips it becomes clear that they are aware that their community's memory and history are not that immaculate.

One of the most reasonable voices is found in the memoirs and writings of Stjepan Horvat, World War II Zagreb University rector, an intellectual who later stayed out of politics and dedicated himself to science. His memoirs from 1946 and 1947 have been published only recently, in 2022, as well as his letters to Karlo Mirth in Mirth's book in 2003. Apart from being critical towards the NDH regime (criticizing nepotism, cronyism, and ambition of people who were unfit for the offices that they were in charge of) and stating that it had fascist elements, he recognized the atrocities committed and talked about political responsibility at the time when Jaspers published his seminal book on the German guilt.[31] But, without reading it, he predicted the future for the emigrants: "This emigration will have to accept the destiny of all the known emigrations. Not only will it not play a significant, but no role in the future of Croatia. Nor will its people. Maybe there will be

27 Interview with S.E.K. (born in 1942), November 17, 2017.

28 Group interview with members of the 1.5 generation (D.V., D.F., and M.G.), October 3, 2016.

29 Interview with D.A.J. (born in 1934), July 30, 2018.

30 Interview with S.H., second generation, October 2016.

31 Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

individuals, whose personal intellectual, character or moral virtues allow that they elevate and preserve themselves and do something in the future. But they will be rare, very rare, to the extent that it is sad to think about it."[32] And this is something that the diaspora did not want to accept. They wanted to have the leading role in the future of Croatia, because they believed that their sacrifice for Croatia should be recognized. He also questioned the possibility of the émigré community's return: "Can we after all the events that we participated in ourselves, really expect to go back crowned with glory? We surely must not, because there is no return to the old state. … It is more probable the opposite, that the circumstances and the people together with them will change, that we will be two worlds and that our return will be a new disappointment."[33]

Consequentially, and by way of conclusion, the question imposes itself: why is the case of the Croatian post-World War II diaspora in Argentina relevant today? Apart from understanding how diaspora communities function, and familiarizing ourselves with the mechanisms and tools used to preserve and transmit memory over time and through generations, the case studied in this book shows us how ideas survive, reconfigure, and come back. Although Tuđman's project of a modern Republic of Croatia was based on the "all-Croat reconciliation," much of the dominant Croatian nationalist discourse in the 1990s was explicitly about the rejection of Communist multinational identities and the "rescue" of Croatian identity from the perceived threat of the other. We observe a process of transition to ethnopolitics that needed to destroy the multinational Yugoslav identity and reaffirm atomized and exclusive ethnic identities. According to Subotić, the post-Yugoslav nation building implied the rejection of Communism and the reconnection with the pre-Communist, more purely national character of the state, so the NDH as a proto-state served as inspiration for the contemporary manifestation of the ethnic state.[34]

That is why in Croatia, post-1990s elites rehabilitated many anti-Communist public figures, including those who were also fascist allies. And the work has already been done by the diaspora itself, by re-signifying themselves from philo-fascist into anti-communists and then into democrats and real defenders of national interests. And when Croatia became independent,

32 Karlo Mirth, *Život u emigraciji* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2003), 123.

33 Stjepan Horvat, *Mi izbjeglice. Razmatranja o suvremenoj hrvatskoj problematici iz perspektive izbjegličkog logora* (Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2022), 49.

34 Jelena Subotić, "The Mythologizing of Communist Violence," in *Post-Communist Transitional Justice: Lessons from Twenty-Five Years of Experience*, ed. Lavinia Stan and Nadya Nedelsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 188–210.

their ideas entered the political scene through the back door and backfired in the long term. By letting them into the mainstream and giving them space in public, they entered the democratic scene, and permeated the far-right populist discourse, which is not totalitarian, but lies on similar principles: anti-liberalism, anti-socialism, and anti-egalitarianism, upholding a messianic and charismatic leader who represents the people and claims to know what the people want, and espouses a radical us vs. them discourse, while also downplaying the separation of powers, the independence and legitimacy of a free press, and the rule of law.

Right-wing populism and fascism are connected and yet separate forms of autocratic leadership. "However, only fascists seek to become full-fledged dictators, wishing to fully impose their will with permanent power. By contrast, populist leaders challenge but do not destroy democracy," Finchelstein concludes in his book on "wannabe fascists."[35] But with the current rise of the far right in the West, and the destruction of the democratic institutions from within, it is yet to be seen if they will only stop at challenging democracy, and not end up destroying it. This case study hopefully demonstrates how historical fascism survived, re-signified over time, and adapted itself in the twenty-first century. Apart from the substantial role of the Croatian diaspora in the 1990s war and independence (through lobbying, and financial and military support), the involvement of the diaspora in Croatian politics persists today—whether from abroad or at home—and their political engagement has affected and eroded the democratic standards of modern Croatia, especially after joining the EU.

35 Federico Finchelstein, *The Wannabe Fascists: A Guide to Understanding the Greatest Threat to Democracy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2024), 9.

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2. Croatian State Archives, Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman (HDA HR—HDA—1741, UPRH Franjo Tuđman)
3. Archives of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences
4. Croatian University Library—Archives of the Croatian press in exile
5. Archives of the Republic of Slovenia
6. Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–91) (DA MSP RS)
7. Belgrade University Library Svetozar Marković—online press archives
8. Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of the Argentine Republic (MRECIC)
9. Archives of the Directorate of Intelligence of the Police of the Province of Buenos Aires (DIPPBA)
10. Argentinian National Library—Press Collection
11. Argentinian National Library—Rogelio García Lupo Collection
12. Archive of Croats in Argentina—online archives
13. *Studia Croatica*—online archives
14. Archives of School Cristo Rey, Dock Sud, courtesy of Sister Teresa Kovačević
15. Personal archives of Josip Smolčić, Montevideo, Uruguay, courtesy of Eduardo Antonich
16. Personal archives of Luka Anić, courtesy of Clara Anich, Buenos Aires
17. Personal archives of Štefica Fany Nekić, Comodoro Rivadavia
18. Archives of the National Directorate of Information and Intelligence (DNII) Uruguay

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Index