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## **Weddings of the Dead: Ustasha Funerals and Life Cycle Rituals in Fascist Croatia**

**Abstract:** This paper seeks to thoroughly describe the 1941 Ustasha funerals of Mijo Babić and Antun Pogorelec, two of the most important early Ustasha martyrs, and to demonstrate the centrality of funeral practices in the Ustasha project to reconfigure Croatian society in the 1940s and its role in mediating the relationship between the individual and the state. Funeral practices are not seen only as cultural values imposed from above, but also as events of importance for the members of the movement as well as their supporters in the wider local community that participated in them.

**Keywords:** Independent State of Croatia, Ustasha movement, fascism, funeral practices

Ritual, as anthropologists have noted, is a means of bringing order and making sense of change in societies being transformed. In her classic study of the rituals and life and death cycles of a Romanian village in the late 1970s, Gail Kligman wrote that rituals, rather than imposing a “synchronic, static vision of culture in history,” produced a “structure of relations in time and space sensitive to historical transformation.” As such, they imposed a “hegemonic” view upon what were actually paradoxical realities, thereby “ordering and controlling the transitions and the potential disorder associated with them.” As Kligman also notes, life cycle rituals such as funerals, weddings, births and, in the case of rural Romanian society, weddings of the dead produce as well as reproduce the social order itself, linking individual and “social-structural developmental cycles.” Life cycle rituals, in particular, she writes may be viewed as “condensed, symbolic expressions of the nature and dimensions of social relations and exchange.” Since they require collective participation, such rituals represent the transformation of the individual as a transformation of the collectivity. In essence, then, these life cycle rituals express a system of thought and action that structures fundamental gender relations, life and death and nature and culture. It is a system which makes it possible for disorder such as illness and death to be incorporated into

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experience and to be made comprehensible. At the same time, such rituals also help to mediate relations between the state, communities, and the individual.<sup>1</sup>

In her study of rural Transylvania, Kligman observed that rituals were a means by which ordinary citizens in traditional peasant communities – “from below” – could cope with systematic, rapid and fundamental change “from above” in the form of the Romanian socialist state. But sometimes life cycle rituals are incarnated by totalitarian states as a means of inculcating a population with its value system and transforming the practices and rituals of the party-state as everyday experience for the masses. In such a way, they aspire to remove any intermediary or civic space between the people and the state so that the two are symbiotically conjoined. While this is hard to achieve even in centrally planned and efficient bureaucratic states with large urban centres and educated populations generally well disposed to programmes of developmental modernization, it is a far more challenging enterprise in predominantly rural societies where the movement aiming at reshaping everyday life lacks countrywide support or strong roots in local communities. Such was the case with the Ustasha movement, the fascist movement which founded and ruled – often chaotically, usually precariously – the satellite wartime Independent State of Croatia [Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH] between 1941 and its collapse in 1945 with the support of Italian and German occupation forces. Yet studying the life cycle rituals and practices of the Ustasha movement in the 1940s can tell us important things about the nature of Ustasha rule.

One of the rituals Kligman examined in her book was the “wedding of the dead” [*Nunta mortului*], a practice in which people of marriageable age who remain unwed at the time of their death undergo a symbolic wedding ceremony as part of their funeral rite dressed in wedding clothes. The aim of this ritual is to placate the soul of the deceased and to prevent them returning as spirits or the living dead [*strigoi*] to realize their thwarted social destiny or fulfil their sexual desires.<sup>2</sup> Although the Ustasha movement developed numerous life cycle rituals for aspects of everyday life such as Ustasha weddings, libraries and drug stores, the most significant contribution the movement made to the practice of everyday life was in funerary practices, in particular the burial of militia men who had fallen in battle against insurgents. These elaborate funerary practices became part of a wider set of rituals related to the commemoration of martyrs and the consecration of their bodies. As such, it represented a means by which the Ustasha movement sought to root its dead in the local communities from which they had come in a context in which their claim to legitimacy as the representatives of

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<sup>1</sup> Gail Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 7–24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 215–47.

the nation was ideologically and socially contested. As importantly, the rituals of martyrdom and the Ustasha life cycle also served as a means through which the movement aimed to instill order and discipline within often disputatious local Ustasha camps and organizations far from the centre.

Through a thick description of one set of Ustasha funerals – the burials of Mijo Babić and Antun Pogorelec, two of the most important early Ustasha martyrs following the establishment of the new state – this article seeks to demonstrate the centrality of funeral practices in the Ustasha project to reconfigure Croatian society in the 1940s and its role in mediating the relationship between the individual and the state. This approach also sheds light on the subjectivity and perspectives of the Ustasas themselves, demonstrating that funerary practices were not simply a set of cultural values imposed from above, but had real meaning for those members and activists of the movement as well as their supporters in the wider local community that participated in them.

At the same time, a microhistory of the funerary practices of wartime Croatia complicates our picture of the role which religion played in the life of the state and challenges us to think more imaginatively about the ways in which the Ustasha movement utilized the rites and iconography of Catholicism for its own ideological purposes.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, perhaps, zeroing in on the funeral rituals and martyrdom culture of the movement helps to explain the sanguinary and ritualistic nature of Ustasha mass killing, probably the defining aspect of Ustasha rule. In fact, as the story of the deaths and funerals of Babić and Pogorelec suggest, there was a symbiotic relationship between the ritualistic and performative nature of Ustasha mass killing in the early months of the state's existence and the practices the movement employed to bid farewell to its martyrs. In contrast to the subjects discussed in Gail Kligman's study, the life cycle habits of the Ustasha movement involved and were understood to involve both rituals of killing and dying.

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<sup>3</sup> Current scholarship on the Ustasha regime and Catholicism tends to focus on the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church as an institution and the importance (or lack thereof) of Catholicism to Ustasha ideology. So far, there have been few anthropological or sociological readings of the role of Catholic traditions and rites in the movement, including at the local or ground level. See e.g., Nevenko Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans: National Racial Identity and Protected Jews in the Independent State of Croatia* (London, 2013), 6–7; Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Policy of Forced Religious Conversion, 1941–1942," *Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 1 (January 2005): 113. Cf with Radu Harald Dinu, *Faschismus, Religion und Gewalt in Südösteuropa: Die Legion Erzengel Michael und die Ustaša im historischen Vergleich* (Wiesbaden, 2013), 229, 250, 252.

### *A Short History of Ustasha Funerary Practices and Mass Killing*

In most fascist states, the belief in the afterlife, the commemoration of the dead and the belief in the transcendence of martyrs have been central elements of cultural politics and public ritual. This was the case in both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.<sup>4</sup> It was also true of many Southeast European fascist movements in the 1930s and 1940s. In contrast to the sacralization of politics in Italy and Germany which typically used the concept of blood discursively and symbolical and conceptualized the martyr leaving behind a pristine body, martyrdom culture in Romania and Croatia, however, was more sanguinary in nature, emphasizing the dismemberment, mutilation, torture and humiliation of the martyr's body and emphasizing the notion that immortal life came through death. By contrast, this latter idea only entered mainstream Nazi culture after it became clear that the war was lost.<sup>5</sup> The sanguinary aspect of martyrdom culture in both the Romanian Legionary movement and the Ustasha movement in part, at least, represented a form of mirror imaging in which the ritualized and performative methods by which Ustasha militia men and Legionary death squads slaughtered "national enemies" in mass liquidations – in the case of the Legionaries mostly Jews and in the case of the Ustashes mostly Serbs – was projected back onto the bodies of fallen comrades. In both the short-lived Legionary state and fascist Croatia, the programmes of mass killing initiated by the respective states in order to render them ethnically or nationally pure were accompanied by sacralized forms of politics which stressed the need for martyrdom and the nationally regenerative power of blood. These drew heavily on the rites of organized religion – in the case of the Legionary movement Romanian Orthodox traditions and in the case of the Ustasha movement, Catholicism.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The standard works on Italy and Germany remain Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford, (Cambridge, Mass, 1996) and Jay Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Geyer, "'There is a Land Where Everything is Pure: Its Name is Land of Death.' Some Observations on Catastrophic Nationalism," in *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Greg Eghigian and Matthew Paul Berg (College Station: Texas A and M Press, 2002), 138–40; Jay Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Cambridge and New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1992); idem, *Hitler's Poets: Literature and Politics in the Third Reich* (Cambridge and New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2008), esp. 197–99. For a useful overview of Nazi martyrdom culture, see Jesús Casquete, "Martyr Construction and the Politics of Death in National Socialism," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, nos. 3–4 (2009): 265–83.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding ritualized and symbolic killing by Ustasha militias, see e.g., Radu Harald Dinu, "Honor, Shame, and Warrior Values: The Anthropology of Ustasha Violence," in *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia*, ed. Rory Yeomans (New York: Rochester University Press, 2016), 119–42. See also Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs: Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941–1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger

Likewise, within the Legionary movement in the 1930s and the Ustasha state in the 1940s, public life was structured by a series of sacralized ceremonies and festivals distinguished by the eulogization of fascist martyrs, demands for the avenging of their shed blood through the “cleansing” of the national body, and a conviction that they continued to live beyond the grave and command their troops from the afterlife. In Legionary Romania and fascist Croatia, the politics of sacralization had strongly instrumentalizing uses. It aimed to bring the masses together in collective mourning for fallen martyrs who were to be incarnated as pristine martyrs who had sacrificed their lives, suffering agonizing deaths for the salvation of the homeland. As such, they were a source of temporal legitimation, palingenetic rebirth and national regeneration.<sup>7</sup> With the veneration of the lives and deaths of these fascist martyrs from which all sordid aspects of their past were expunged, funerary practices and martyrdom culture provided ordinary people as well as the movement’s activists with a set of instructions by which to live. As much as they endeavoured to bind citizens to the movement in shared mourning for the martyrs, rituals of commemoration sought to mobilize them around a set of national-ideological aims, including the eradication of “undesired elements.” In this way, the politics of sacralization was an integral part of the system of terror.<sup>8</sup>

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Edition, 2013); idem, “The disposal of corpses in an ethnicized civil war: Croatia, 1941–45,” in *Human Remains and Mass Violence: Methodological Approaches*, eds. Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Elisabeth Anstett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 106–28. For the Legionary case, see Dinu, *Faschismus, Religion und Gewalt in Sudosteuropa: Die Legion Erzengel Michael und die Ustasa im historischen Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013); Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the Archangel Michael in Inter-war Romania* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures & Societies, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the palingenetic and regenerative myths in fascism, see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Houndmills, 2007). See also Griffin, “‘I am no longer human. I am a Titan. I am a God!’ The Fascist Quest to Regenerate Time,” in *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin*, ed. Matthew Feldman (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2008), 3–23.

<sup>8</sup> The literature on death and martyrdom rituals in the Legionary Movement is extensive. Important studies include Radu Ioanid, “The sacralised politics of the Romanian Iron Guard,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (2004): 419–53; Valentin Săndulescu, “Sacralised Politics in Action: The February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (2007): 259–269; Constantin Iordachi, “God’s Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania,” in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 326–56; Mihai Stelian Rusu, “Staging Death: Christofascist Necropolitics during the National Legionary State in Romania, 1940–1941,” *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 3 (2020): 576–89. There is com-

As an analysis of the funerary rituals after the deaths of Babić and Pogorelec demonstrates, the discourse and semiotics of mysticism, sacrifice and rebirth which drew heavily on Catholic rites became a central an element of Ustasha life cycle practices. In addition, Ustasha mysticism and the sacralization of politics were not purely top-down, instrumentalized processes imposed from above; rather, evidence from local Ustasha camps suggests that Ustasha activists believed in the values represented by the movement's martyrdom culture. When Krune Devčić, a lieutenant in the elite Poglavnik Bodyguard Battalion militia [Poglavnikov tjelesne sdrug – PTS], died in battle against Partisan insurgents in Ludbreg in 1944, *Ustaša* journal held him up as the epitome of a new "race" of ideal Spartan warriors whose life would set an example from which younger Ustasha officers would learn.<sup>9</sup> His recovered body was placed on an altar in the Ante Pavelić barracks in an open casket surrounded by candles, a huge crucifix, a tapestry of a crucifix behind him and a guard of honour as well as flowers; the front cover of *Ustaša* showed a montage from various moments of his life cycle, including his funeral and a photograph of a teenage Devčić immediately after he joined the Ustasha movement in the 1930s. In his obituary, Mijo Bzik, the Ustasha propaganda chief, wrote that Devčić had "drenched" the liberated Croatian soil in his blood. Addressing him directly, Bzik expressed the view that despite dying Devčić's spirit would continue to be with them.<sup>10</sup>

This public, state-organized funerary rite sounds a lot like bottom-up life cycle ceremonies organized by local Ustasha camps throughout the state to commemorate their fallen martyrs. One of these was the funeral held on 6 March 1942 at the Zavidovići Ustasha camp for two "brave warriors," Franjo Duvančić and Ivica Kocer, who had perished fighting insurgents. The camp leader described how their bodies were transferred to the Ustasha camp at Zavidovici where they were exhibited in the middle of the hall surrounded by candles and flowers before receiving an elaborate funeral accompanied by a local factory orchestra playing a funeral dirge and emotional eulogies by local Ustasha officials. The funeral, the leader noted, was the "most solemn that could be recalled in this area." It was attended by large numbers of citizens and peasants.<sup>11</sup>

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paratively less literature on such practices in the Ustasha movement. See Rory Yeomans, "Cults of Death and Fantasies of Annihilation: The Croatian Ustasha Movement in Power, 1941–45," *Central Europe* 3, no. 2 (November 2005): 121–42; idem, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Stipe Kljaić, "Apostles, Saints' Days, and Mass Mobilization: The Sacralization of Politics in the Ustasha State," in *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Fascist Croatia*, ed. Rory Yeomans (New York: Rochester University Press, 2015), 145–64.

<sup>9</sup> "† Vitez Krune Devčić, uzor častnik," *Ustaša* 14, no. 9 (27 February 1944): 1–3.

<sup>10</sup> Mijo Bzik, "Naš nezaboravni Krune," *Ustaša* 14, no. 9 (27 February 1944): 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> Zadovići Ustasha camp leader to the State Information and Propaganda Directorate, 26 March 1942, HDA, NDH, GRP, 3,234/8756/42.



*Mass Killing and the Martyrdom of Babić and Pogorelec*

If the wartime Croatian fascist state was defined by one policy in the early months of its existence, it was the campaign of genocide against the state's Serb minority. In the new state which comprised Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina and parts of the Vojvodina, ethnic Serbs made up approximately one third of the total population or nearly two million inhabitants. The Ustasha regime devised a number of methods to eradicate or dramatically reduce the state's Serb population. These included a programme of mass expulsion to occupied Serbia; deportation to the embryonic concentration camp system, most notably the Jadovno-Slana-Metajna concentration camp complex in the Lika region and on the Island of Pag; and through ghettoization and exclusion from the economic life of the state.

Numerous laws and edicts were also introduced which targeted Serbian community life such as the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Serbian schools and the Cyrillic script.<sup>12</sup> However, by far the most frequent tactic used in the formative period of the state's existence was a series of campaigns of mass killing in the countryside, led by Ustasha militias, assisted by groups of so-called "wild Ustashes."<sup>13</sup> Although some of these Ustasha militias were local, more usually the mass killings were organized and led by militias sent directly from Zagreb who used the knowledge of the structure of the local Serb population provided by regional Ustasha members to arrest prominent Serbs. The first

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<sup>12</sup> Regarding anti-Serbian legislation under the Ustasha regime, see Igor Vuković, "An Order of Crime: The Criminal Law of the Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945," *Balkanica* 48, no. 1 (January 2017): 289–342.

<sup>13</sup> The term "wild Ustashes" ["*Divlji Ustaše*"] refers to bands of Ustashes which were not formally part of the official Ustasha militias, but which participated in the mass killing of Serb civilians in the countryside, especially in the formative months of the state's existence. Sometimes, these were informal auxiliary groups of local citizens dressed in civilian clothing. However, more often they wore Ustasha uniforms. When Pavelić ordered a halt to the killing sprees in the late summer of 1941 in the face of a growing uprising by Serbs, the "wild Ustashes" were invoked as convenient scapegoats, depicted in the press as lawless and bloodthirsty bandits outside the control of the central Ustasha authorities. They were contrasted with the "honourable" and "legal" activities of "self-sacrificing" Ustasha Corps. After orders were issued by Pavelić to disband the "wild" Ustashes, a propaganda campaign was launched against them; a number of alleged "wild" Ustashes were, with great publicity, executed. However, as Tomislav Dulić has pointed out, when Pavelić ordered a halt to the first wave of killings in early July 1941, most "wild" Ustashes stood down, suggesting that the GUS enjoyed control over them. Moreover, they were, for the most part, provided with arms and uniforms by GUS. In fact, while most of the early large-scale massacres were perpetrated by militia units sent directly from Zagreb working with local Ustasha units, the spectre of the "wild Ustashes" nonetheless proved to be a convenient means of publicly separating the regime from the atrocities it had itself organised.

to be targeted were members of the Serb intelligentsia, affluent businessmen, Orthodox priests and the middle-class elite. Usually, they would be taken away under the pretext of being questioned about alleged communist or nationalist activities and then detained and beaten before being transported by truck to outlying villages where they were murdered with axes, sickles, hammers, and mallets and then thrown into deep karst pits or ravines. While elites were usually the first to be murdered, increasingly as Ustasha militias were confronted by resistance from Serb communities, this policy of “cleansing” was extended to the whole population in a particular region and was frequently accompanied by the mutilation of the bodies and faces of the victims.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, although plans for the destruction of the Jews and to a lesser extent Roma and Sinti were already underway during the formative stage of the state’s existence, they mostly took the form of legal sanctions, economic and social exclusion and ghettoization, and deportation to concentration camps rather than mass killing in the countryside.<sup>15</sup>

Babić and Pogorelec were actively involved in the initial stages of Ustasha anti-Serb terror. Both of them had been active members of the Ustasha movement since its founding in the early 1930s, and both had been implicated in terrorist attacks against the Yugoslav state. Babić had participated in the 1929 assassination of the newspaper editor Toni Schlegel as well as being involved in various gun-running and weapon-smuggling activities while Pogorelec, who had taken an oath of allegiance to the Ustasha movement in 1933, had been sentenced to death for his involvement, along with his nephew, Josip Begović, and other Ustashes, in a conspiracy to assassinate King Aleksandar during a visit to Zagreb in December 1933. While his young nephew, a radicalized student at the University of Zagreb, was executed for his role in the assassination attempt, Pogorelec’s sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in Lepoglava prison. He was released in a general amnesty of 1938.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Babić fled Yugosla-

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<sup>14</sup> The standard English-language work on the mass killing of Serbs in the formative period of the Independent State of Croatia is Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–1942* (Uppsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 2007). More recent important publications include Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Serbo-Croat studies include Vladimir Dedijer, Protjerivanje Srba sa ognjište 1941–1944* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1985) and Gojo Riste Dakina, *Genocid nad Srbima u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, there were some killings of Jews in rural parts of Croatia and Bosnia by Ustasha militias; most of the victims were refugees from other states who had settled in Yugoslavia in the period between the late 1930s and April 1941.

<sup>16</sup> Stipe Pilić, “Virovitička hrvatska nacionalna omladina između dva svjetska rata do pristupa Ustaškoj mladeži 1941. godine,” *Zbornik Janković* no. 4 (2019): 219–20.



via for the Ustasha terrorist training camps of Italy and Hungary following the slaying of Schlegel and a shootout with the police during which one policeman was killed. While in exile, Babić, alongside other members of the hardline Ustasha elite around Ante Pavelić, the leader of the movement, played a central role in plans for the extermination of the Serbs in a future Ustasha-led independent Croatian state.<sup>17</sup>

Following the invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia by Axis forces and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, both Babić and Pogorelec were to play important roles in the anti-Serb terror of the Ustasha regime. Babić was appointed an adjutant to Pavelić who as Ustasha leader was the supreme ruler [“Poglavnik” or chief] of the new state as well as being made a commissioner in the nerve centre of the Ustasha government, the Main Ustasha Headquarters [Glavni Ustaški stan – GUS]. Shortly, Babić was appointed head of Bureau 3 of the Ustasha Supervisory Service [Ustaška nadzorna služba – UNS], the Ustasha version of the Gestapo, where he was charged with the establishment of the embryonic concentration camp system for the liquidation of the state’s ethnic enemies.<sup>18</sup> However, at the beginning of June 1941, Babić, now a captain in the PTS, was dispatched along with Pogorelec, a sub-lieutenant, to eastern Herzegovina on the orders of Andrija Artuković, the interior minister, with orders to repress a rebellion among the local Serb population which had broken out in response to the massacres by Ustasha militias in the region and to exterminate or “cleanse” the Serb population. It was during this operation in the village of Berkovići on 4 July that Babić and Pogorelec were killed by insurgents.<sup>19</sup> In response, Pavelić declared eight days of mourning for the members of his elite bodyguard battalion and the body of Babić was transported through Sarajevo to his final resting place in his home region on the outskirts of Zagreb.

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<sup>17</sup> Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 287; Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 53.

<sup>18</sup> Slavko and Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Liber, 2001), 268.

<sup>19</sup> The most comprehensive accounts of the uprising in Eastern Herzegovina by Serb insurgents are Davor Marijan, “Lipanski ustanak u istočnoj Hercegovini,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 35, no. 2 (October 2003): 545–76 and Nevenka Bajić, “Komunistička partija Jugoslavije u Hercegovini u ustanku 1941. godine,” *Prilozi* 2 (1966): 193–260. However, Marijan’s article, in particular, should be read with caution as it is generally apologetic in tone. Also useful are Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005); Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler’s Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941–1943* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Savo Skoko, *Pokolji hercegovačkih Srba ‘41* (Belgrade: Stručna knjiga, 1991).

The deaths and funerals of both Babić and Pogorelec received extensive and emotional coverage in the national and party media.<sup>20</sup>

The official internal report prepared for the Poglavnik's Military Office explained that in the days prior to the arrival of Babić, Pogorelec and other members of the PTS, there had been telephone requests from various localities in Eastern Herzegovina requesting help in the form of men, weapons, and munitions because the Croatian population feared that on 28 June, the Serbian festival of St Vitus Day [Vidovdan], local Serbs would launch an insurgency. As a result, hundreds of rifles as well as munitions were issued to regional Ustasha centres to arm volunteers from Croatian villages so they could defend themselves. Nevertheless, the report also acknowledged that the "radical cleansing" operations in Berkovići, Fojnica, Gacko and other places by Ustasha units, killing "not just men but also women and children" en masse and "throwing the bodies into various pits and rivers" as well as the plundering and burning down of the homes of Serb inhabitants, some of it carried out by Croatian civilians, had stimulated the uprisings. It complained that there was a general impression that there was no legal government in the region and that instead the Ustasha Centre in Mostar had "sucked in" men of "various occupations and dubious political pasts" who aimed to create "turmoil and disorder."<sup>21</sup>

A report from the military section of the Ustasha centre in Mostar, written by an unnamed lieutenant, by contrast, valorized the actions of Babić, attributing his death to rushing bravely into action against Serb insurgents who wanted to destroy the state. The report stressed the self-sacrificing nature not only of Babić's deeds, but also those of his comrade Pogorelec; they had sought to immolate themselves for the love of comradeship, the salvation of the nation and "liquidation" of the rebellion. The report described Babić as "always calm and smiling," thereby underlining his fanaticism and bravery as the commander of the unit, who had sacrificed his life, opting to selflessly stand in the "first fighting ranks." Falling in the heat of battle, it was only later, it explained, after the "liquidation" of the insurgents' front, that his comrades were able to retrieve Babić's body and confirm that the news "to our great sadness" was true. There then followed an account of the events leading to Babić and Pogorelec's death, reconstructed from eyewitness testimonies. Note, in particular, the application of idealized heroic imagery, detailed descriptions of the manner of their deaths and emphasis on the brotherhood of the two Ustasha fighters:

The deceased Babić arrived with his unit...where they found Chetniks in a heavily fortified position. To set an example to the other Ustasha fighters,

<sup>20</sup> Bajić, "Komunistička partija Jugoslavije u Hercegovini u ustanku 1941. godine," 225.

<sup>21</sup> Special assistant to the Poglavnik to the military office of the Poglavnik, 30 June 1941, HDA, NDH, Jadransko Divizija Područje, 1203.3/8/30/VI.

he endeavoured to pass through a clearing of open space which was under the deadly fire of Chetniks towards their positions to attack them further. During this action, he was shot in the temple and riddled with Chetnik bullets. His long-time partner and friend and well-known Ustasha fighter Ivan Pogorelac [i.e., Antun Pogorelec], when he saw that Captain Babić had died, raced alone in an assault towards the Chetnik position, climbed onto the cliff and threw a hand grenade into the Chetnik nest. During this action, he was hit in the head and fell gloriously. As he reached the cliffs, all he had left of his Ustasha uniform was his cap which before he perished fell off his head. First from the battlefield, the dead body of Captain Babić was removed and immediately transferred by car to Stolac to be then transported to Zagreb. As it was already late in the night, the identity of the deceased Pogorelec was not immediately confirmed until after the body of Babić had already been taken to Stolac and so a special transport had to be ordered for the deceased Pogorelec.<sup>22</sup>

This description suggests that Pogorelec was almost immolated in the attack by insurgents. However, in his account subsequently published in the party journal, *Ustaša*, Pogorelec's PTS comrade, Antun Žličarić, expressed it somewhat more aesthetically, writing that he had "fallen heroically." Although his naked corpse remained unclaimed for some time on the top of the cliff, in dying he had testified his faith in the Poglavnik and Croatia "in blood."<sup>23</sup>

While their immediate Ustasha comrades mourned Babić and Pogorelec, as Đorđe Jovanović, a fifty-year-old cabinet maker from Srpska Trnova in Bijeljina, living in Zagreb, testified to the Countrywide War Crimes Commission in 1945, their passing was marked by other Ustashes by meting out terror to Serb residents. Ustashes in Zagreb, for example, gathered together 250 Serb families as hostages who were to be shot in retaliation for the two men's deaths. On 5 July 1941, Jovanović was arrested with his wife and two children, and they were loaded onto a wagon at the station but were saved when a German transportation train deporting Slovenians to Serbia ordered the Ustashes to release the Serb hostages who were then transported with the Slovenians to Belgrade. Nevertheless, he had lost everything; he later found out that his cabinet-making workshop had been sold at auction while he and his family, now destitute refugees alone in Belgrade, had been forced to leave behind the entirety of their possessions.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "Izvjestaj o okolnostima pod koji je poginuo ustaški satnik Mijo Babić," undated but probably July 1941, HDA, NDH, Jadranska Divizija Područje, 1203.3/unnumbered.

<sup>23</sup> Bu., "Mučenički put Antuna Pogoreleca," *Ustaša* 11, no. 23 (28 June 1942): 2.

<sup>24</sup> Đorđe Jovanović to the Commissariat of the ZKRZ in Belgrade, Serbia, undated but 1945, HDA, NDH, CGK-ZKRZ, 1.306/330/1.

### *Laying to Rest Mijo Babić, Ustasha "Blood Sacrifice"*

After they died, both Babić and Pogorelec received elaborate funerals and commemorations at the state and local level. First, let's consider the funeral of Babić who was the better-known and more illustrious of the two martyrs and therefore the recipient of more extensive funerary rites. Before Babić was buried at Mirogoj, his coffin was driven through the streets of Sarajevo and other towns and villages, a reflection of the grief ordinary people felt at his death, according to *Hrvatski narod*, the party's daily newspaper: "Through all the regions and villages which the dead body of Mijo Babić passed by car, from Nevesinje through Mostar to Sarajevo and further around Bosnia, the Croatian people everywhere greeted the dead Ustasha fighter decisively, peacefully and respectfully. Through Hercegovina his car was accompanied by Ustasha youth from Stolac. Everywhere the car was showered with flowers, blessed with water and accompanied by the prayers of people." This was especially the case on the arrival of Babić's body in Sarajevo where it received "a magnificent and touching" reception in the square in front of Saint Josip's church to honour "the posthumous remains of the national warrior and hero Mijo Babić." From Sarajevo, the car carrying his body, accompanied by a phalanx of automobiles, travelled through the Ivan Mountains; among those escorting Babić's body were the commissioner for Bosnia, Jure Francetić, later commander of the Black Legion militia, and Božidar Bralo, a prominent member of Francetić's council of commissars and the Catholic parish priest of Saint Josip's. Members of the Ustasha Corps and Croatian army, some of whom were playing music, lined the route. In front of the church, a group of Ustasha peasants who had travelled from Štupa in national costume gathered as did a "multitude" of citizens who crowded the square and the nearby streets. Two Ustasha units were positioned at the entrance of the church and when the dead body of Babić arrived at 4pm from the railway station, the bells of Saint Josip's rang out to announce the cortege's appearance and a funeral dirge from the Ustasha Corps orchestra broadcast the "mournful march" of the phalanx of automobiles led by Bralo's. In the square on Marijin Dvor, six uniformed Ustashes lifted the silver coffin draped in the Croatian tricolor onto their shoulders into the church where a catafalque had been prepared. Behind the coffin, an "enormous mass" swarmed into the church. Dozens of wreaths from Ustashes and comrades had been laid behind the catafalque. As soon as the coffin entered the church, the rites of absolution began to be carried out over the dead body by Bralo and his assistants.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, the Zagreb daily *Novi list* reported that in downtown Sarajevo residents had bid farewell to the dead body of their "meritorious son" in "a mag-

<sup>25</sup> "Herceg-Bosna odala je počast junačkom ustaškom borcu Miji Babiću," *Hrvatski narod*, 6 July 1941.

nificent, worthy and sad way. Only two days before, it wrote, he had fallen at the hands of the same oppressors “against whom he had fought heroically for twelve long years at home and abroad,” thereby linking insurgents and terrorized Serb communities in rural Bosnia to the interwar Yugoslav regime. Declaring Babić to be “one of the most shining Ustasha personalities,” it noted that “everywhere the truck appeared with the dead body of the Ustasha, people piously removed their caps and lowered the hoes from their callused hands, bidding farewell to the deceased Miško.”<sup>26</sup> Inside the church, Bralo gave a farewell eulogy shot through with sanguinary imagery drawing attention to the fact that only a few days after visiting this church he had perished on the battlefield, thereby framing him as a virtuous Catholic son. “Our dear Mijo! Not even eight days have passed since you stepped inside this very church so vigorous, strong, powerful and healthy and prayed before the defender of all of us from death, our Saint Josip. You were amazed at his temple and the man, the archbishop who built it, and just four days after leaving this blessed church of Saint Josip’s, embracing the bloody tricolor, accompanied by the thoughts of your faithful comrades, you are no more our dear Mijo.” Fate, he noted, had demanded that Babić sacrifice his life for the liberation of the homeland, but Sarajevo, he declared, would accompany him “with love all the way to the arcades of Zagreb in the company of the July Victims and those thousands of Croatian revolutionaries who immolated themselves and gave their lives for the homeland.” Alluding to the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia at Easter, he asked, “this great God who on the day of his resurrection opened such a sacred door of liberation” to reward Babić for his Ustasha work “from the first days to the last moment when the shameful dum-dum bullets took you from us” and for “dear Miško” to “remain with us” in God eternally.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> While Babić’s body was driven across Bosnia in a hearse, it seems that it arrived at and left the church in a truck. Trucks were symbolically important for Ustasha militias, both as a method of transport for their killing spree and as the favoured form of vehicle for the transportation of their dead. In the countryside, trucks were probably partly favoured for funerals for their space and practicality but also because they served as a means of emphasizing the utilitarian and working-class ethos of the Ustasha movement. It is likely that the exchange of the hearse for the truck carrying Babić’s remains on the journey to the church was a deliberate act, serving to connect Babić and hence the PTS militia to the people.

<sup>27</sup> Bu, “Veličanstven sprovoda ustaškog borca i mučenika Mije Babića,” *Novi list*, 7 July 1941. The “July Victims” [Srpske žrtve] refers to the massacre of protesting Croatian students in Saint Mark’s Square in Zagreb by Austro-Hungarian troops on 29 July 1845. The martyred students were incarnated as revered martyrs in the calendar of the Croatian national struggle and the massacre was also incorporated into the cultural politics of the wartime fascist Croatian state. For example, the massacre is a one of the set pieces in Oktavijan Miletić’s 1944 feature film *Lisinski*, a biopic of the Croatian composer, Vatroslav Lisinski.

After seven uniformed Ustashas lifted the coffin through the main doors, Munir Šahinović-Ekremov, a young writer, journalist and head of the Office of the Vice-President of the Independent State of Croatia paid his own typically emotional and adulatory farewell to the deceased captain of the PTS.<sup>28</sup> Particularly notable here is that he refers to Babić as a “blood sacrifice,” a common term for fallen Ustashas which aimed to imply the predetermined, intentional and necessary nature of their sacrifice.

We today have seen off one of the worthiest blood sacrifices of our liberation, a warrior who burnt entirely in struggle for the freedom of Croatia, the captain Mijo Babić, the best among the best, the most honourable among the most honourable, the most patriotic among the most patriotic. We have lost him at the moment when he came to save his Muslim brothers in Herzegovina and when he came to liberate the Hercegovinan Croats from tyranny. Mijo Babić has fallen, a beautiful hero, he has laid down his life for us, for the freedom of Croatia. He fell at the hands of the eternal enemy which today fantasizes about how it will destroy us. The Croatian people should not mourn this great sacrifice. We say farewell to our great hero with the cry: “Glory to Mijo Babić!”<sup>29</sup>

*Novi list* added that Šahinović-Ekremov was so moved that he could barely finish this speech. “From the masses one heard shrieks. The Ustashas received the coffin; they placed it in the delivery truck which stood in the square in front of the church and then moved off towards the railway station. With the greatest of pain Sarajevo said farewell to the dead Ustasha Mijo Babić.” *Hrvatski narod* reported that on all sides Ustasha comrades accompanied their dead captain. “Under the sad reverberating bells of the church of St Josip’s and military music the funeral cortege set off. Every wreath was carried by three Ustashas. On the square in front of the main station there was a mass farewell by Sarajevo in front of our hero. For the last time, Ustashas raised their right hand to their dead

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<sup>28</sup> Šahinović-Ekremov, one of the more energetic and prolific propagandists for the Ustasha regime in Bosnia, was well known for his emotional tributes to fallen Ustasha militia commanders such as Babić and Francetić, in particular his emphasis on their male warrior “beauty.” Sometimes, it seems even he went too far for the Ustasha censors. An essay he submitted to the Main Directorate for Propaganda [Glavno ravnateljstvo za promičbu – GRP] to mark the announcement of Francetić’s passing in March 1943 was censored for being “profane” and for failing to adhere to the guidelines set down by NARPROS about how to write about his death. See Ivo Bogdan to Mile Starčević, 15 April 1943, HDA, NDH, GRP, 44.237/3077/43. Nonetheless, an eulogy to Francetić by Šahinović-Ekremov was later broadcast on Sarajevo State Radio. In it, he described Francetić as a “beautiful knight” and “handsome hero” who was loved by his “dashing” Legionaries “far more than their own fathers and children, more even than they loved themselves.” Whether this reflected the sentiments of the censored composition is not clear. See Munir Šahinović-Ekremov, “Pozdrav i zavjet Francetiću,” *Novi Sarajevski list*, 6 April 1943.

<sup>29</sup> Bu, “Veličanstven sprovoda ustaškog borca i mučenika Mije Babića,” *Novi list*, 7 July 1941.



comrade Mijo Babić and paid their beloved comrade their final farewell.”<sup>30</sup> *Novi list* added philosophically that “the Croatian and Ustasha blood of the warrior Mijo Babić flowed. Blood! This is the sacred content of Ustasha struggle, and the framework of liberationist thought; in blood, freedom is created and in blood its construction is cemented. Blood flowed and while he fought, sacred and martyred blood consecrated the foundations of Croatia, and these same foundations were once again strengthened by the blood of the Ustasha Mijo Babić.”<sup>31</sup>

Babić’s funeral and burial took place on 6 July 1941 at Mirogoj cemetery, the traditional resting place of all notable Croatian public figures since the nineteenth century. Prior to his burial, his open casket was laid in the mortuary on a catafalque surrounded by wreaths and flowers, protected by an honour guard of Ustasha soldiers. Around the catafalque huge candles burnt, near to which were placed flowers in vases. A Croatian flag had been draped over the coffin as well as two bouquets of flowers in the national colours. Wreaths had been sent from family members and Ustasha comrades including from the Poglavnik to his “adjutant and Ustasha captain” with a second from his fellow PTS fighters addressed “to a brother Ustasha.” Trade unions also sent wreaths: the chauffeurs’ union remembered Babić as an “unforgettable colleague” while Croatian Workers’ Union [Hrvatski radnički savez – HRS] recalled him simply as “our comrade.” Bralo also sent a wreath for a “fearless Ustasha”; for Francetić who would soon join him in the afterlife he was “the most loyal among the most loyal.” His colleagues from Bureau 3 of the UNS, meanwhile, recalled him as a “a model patriot” and the Ustasha camp of Sarajevo as “the hero of our liberation struggle.” The wreath from his wife simply read: “For an unforgettable husband.”<sup>32</sup>

Babić’s funeral was an elaborate affair and began at 4pm with mourners gathering at the mortuary. Facing the mortuary was a unit of the PTS under the command of Ante Moškov as well as a unit of Croatian army officers from the Officers’ Army Training School under the command of Jure Orešković and musical units of the Officers’ School and First Ustasha Regiment, shortly to gain notoriety as the Black Legion. After a blessing performed by the Ustasha priest Vilim Cecelja, the funerary dirge “Mirno spavaj” [Sleep Peacefully] was played by an Ustasha choral group, with soldiers and Ustasha militia men forming an honour guard. At 5pm, the funeral procession walked slowly towards the place of “eternal rest.” A monumental cross was carried at the head of the procession with the words “For Ustasha captain Mijo Babić.” This was accompanied by the huge number of wreaths carried by columns of Ustashes and Croatian youths

<sup>30</sup> “Herceg-Bosna odala je počast junačkom ustaškom borcu Miji Babiću,” *Hrvatski narod*, 6 July 1941.

<sup>31</sup> Bu, “Veličanstven sprovoda ustaškog borca i mučenika Mije Babića,” *Novi list*, 7 July 1941.

<sup>32</sup> “Dirljiv pogreb ustaše Mije Babića,” *Hrvatski narod*, 6 July 1941.

walking next to the coffin. As the procession moved from the mortuary to the "Mirogoj arcade," citizens who were standing in rows "greeted the coffin full of mourning and full of pain," raising their right hands in tribute to the procession and "the body which was being carried in it." Directly behind the coffin stood Cecelja who, at the entrance to Mirogoj, recited a prayer. Then Babić's coffin was once again lifted onto the shoulders of the Ustasha officers who "bore their fellow fighter to his final resting place," accompanied by an Ustasha honour guard. They were followed by his widow Josipa, his father and brother Mato and his sister Francika Brkić, colleagues from the Ustasha Personnel Office of the UNS 3 and high-ranking Ustasha including Andrija Artuković, other members of the hardline Ustasha "Ras" elite, and militia commanders such as Ivica Šarić of the First Ustasha Battalion who had made his mark in planning the mass liquidation of local Serb men in the town of Glina at the beginning of May. Others accompanying the procession included trade union representatives, Ustasha Youth leaders, Ustasha student leaders, and members of the Thirteenth Student Assault Battalion – nicknamed "the Ustasha battalion of death" – whose members had become battle hardened through a series of sanguinary massacres of Serbs in eastern Herzegovina, also in May. Joining these diverse groups, crowds of citizens "followed the sad procession and accompanied the mortal remains of brave Ustasha warrior Mijo Babić to their final rest."<sup>33</sup>

As the mourners led by the family stood by Babić's grave and his dead body was lowered to the accompaniment of funeral music, they listened in "perfect silence, raising their right hand and paying a last farewell to the deceased." A "painful shriek" which "pierced the hearts of those present cried out from the hearts of the deceased's nearest and dearest who were saying their farewell to the person who was dearest to them and whom they were leaving forever... This shriek of pain grew ever louder and stronger as the attendees began to throw earth as the final goodbye to the deceased. The twitching of muscles on the faces of Ustashes who attended this sad event, their warm and mournful glances into the distance, and their thunderous cry: 'Glory to him!' were words of farewell to a comrade, warrior and the best of them."<sup>34</sup>

Mijo Babić's burial at Mirogoj was covered in hermeneutic detail by the press. *Novi list*, for one, vividly described the atmosphere as his body was taken up the long winding hill to its final resting place at Mirogoj, powerfully conveying the visceral grief of mourners, Babić's sanguinary sacrifice and his comrades' desire for vengeance. Note here the evocation of shed blood as not simply a material reality, but a source of regeneration and growth. The newspaper wrote that Babić's death had shaken "the souls of every Ustasha. Many manly eyes moistened with tears but

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "Dirlijiv pogreb ustaše Mije Babića," *Hrvatski narod*, 6 July 1941.

also every Ustasha fist was clenched with anger for the desired satisfaction. The death of the elite warrior Mijo Babić has given the Ustasha movement one martyr more, has given it one sacrifice more, contributed to the altar of the homeland, but has also given it a leader who with his example and his life teaches all Ustasas and the entire Croat people how to perish when one knows why one is perishing. A sacrifice is contributed, a seed is drenched in blood and sown in good earth and the fruit will not lag behind." The newspaper described how the body of Babić had been taken from Zagreb Cathedral on the Kaptol to the mortuary at Mirogoj winding its way through the streets of Novi Ves and Zvijezda to Mirogoj. It noted that as well as the striking visual impression made by the thousands of wreaths carried by mourners as part of the procession, some by hand and others transported by minibus, the funerary music of the orchestra "echoed in the hearts of those present, imbued with a kind of pain of a completely terrifying tone." The account of the different stages of his funeral underlined the mystical nature of Ustasha burial rites and the life cycle of Ustasha martyrdom, especially the notion that the dead continued to communicate with the living beyond the grave, martyred death as a legitimization for what Ustasha theorists termed "the revolution of blood" – the war of extermination against the state's Serb minority – and the idea of the fallen Ustasha fighter as a "blood sacrifice."

A deathly silence began among onlookers when the car carrying the body of the deceased neared. Some magical power streamed from the dead remains of the martyr which at the same time filled us with a venerated sorrow, courage and belief. There were no shrieks, cries, nor were there any laments, no, because this would not be Ustasha conduct. Deep pain for a dead comrade lay on the faces and in the eyes of all those present... With silent steps and deep piety, they accompanied the earthly remains of the Ustasha-martyr, with silent steps and silent pain but a strong and powerful desire for struggle and work imbued with belief in complete victory... As the coffin was taken out of the car, everyone present paid their respects. The coffin was decorated in the Croatian tricolour and was carried by Ustasha comrades into the mortuary. There the lid was removed from the coffin so that all those present could see the head of the martyr and pay their respects to the Ustasha warrior who fell on the field of duty and honour. There, many tears were shed because they could not insensitively look on the young life cut short by bestial hands, because they could not look at death in those eyes which had given so much belief and preserved hope in victory... The sacrifice has been made, the blood has been spilt and there are cries for revenge, and the example of an Ustasha martyr shines and leads Ustasha warriors. The martyred visage of Mijo Babić will remain in the eternal memory among Ustasha ranks and let the Croatian earth liberated by warriors like him be soft. With his conduct, example and life, from his dead lips he speaks and cries out more strongly than if he had remained alive. These lips condemn the killers and

those who stand behind them, condemning and crying out for satisfaction. The apparition of the Ustasha martyr will be eternally among his comrades so that with his example he sends a message, teaches them, leads them, reminds them to be ready.<sup>35</sup>

The newspaper added in an editorial that if in returning to Croatia with the Poglavnik to “liberate” Croatia, he had fulfilled his life’s desire, in perishing Babić had fulfilled a “second equally intense” desire: he had died “gloriously” in the struggle for the homeland and Poglavnik, waiting for something he had “persistently” sought for years. But more than this, Babić’s “blood sacrifice” would encourage other young Ustasha militia men, in spite of their “heroic and manly sorrow,” to temper their grief with the determination to immolate themselves for the homeland. In the meantime, in mourning for their fallen comrade and waiting for death, they lived in two worlds, as flesh and blood warriors prepared to embark “on the same journey” and carrying out their “everyday responsible work” while at the same time their “souls wander in the brown and hard mountains of Herzegovina painted in heroic Ustasha blood.” Babić, though “riddled with the bullets of many stronger enemies,” had a similarly metaphysical existence. The mourners set off with him, *Novi list* wrote, with the intention of asking him “in the last moments of the bodily residence of the dead warrior” to say something about his work as an émigré Ustasha. Thus, Babić was not just a fallen Ustasha martyr but one who spoke as if alive to his young comrades who, the newspaper averred, fervently desired to share his fate.

Aware of and knowing to value their pain in these last moments of farewell to a model warrior, we did not expect any kind of extensive statement. We knew that the Ustasha easily dies and suffers for the homeland and hearth. We knew that he considers death his duty. We knew that [Ustashes] are imbued with a strong belief that penetrates their soul and heart even after the corresponding level of suffering through which they have all passed. But beyond all of this we are deeply impressed by their conviction to be victims and to sacrifice. And we maintain that we are not exaggerating if we say that many of them are sorrowful in their heart that they cannot switch places with Mijo...Because to perish heroically, on the battlefield, in a battle with the sworn enemy and until yesterday tyrants over our race – this is the greatest honour for every Ustasha! But the Ustasha is also a man and a comrade, true to every comrade as if he was his own brother. And thus they...as men and comrades are burdened by thoughts of the eternal farewell from him, all of those from his ranks especially loved.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Bu, “Za ostvarenje velikih ideala potrebne su i velike žrtve: slavna smrt Ustaše Mije Babića,” *Novi list*, 6 July 1941.

<sup>36</sup> “Još jedan kamen u temelje Nezavisne Državne Hrvatske,” *Novi list*, 6 July 1941.

*The Burial of Antun Pogorelec and the Ustasha Funeral-As-Wedding*

In her study of Palestinian martyrdom culture, Laleh Khalili has noted the way in which funerals of young martyrs are transformed into weddings. She writes that the funeral-as-wedding “reaffirms hope amidst death and allows for transformation – however fleeting – of wasted youth and human loss into a meaningful and heroic death that can give dignity and honour.” In such “weddings,” the martyr’s comrades organize “wedding” processions from the martyr’s house to his ostensible grave (“wedding chamber”) while firing bullets in the air. As a political event targeted at national audiences, “the funeral-as-wedding and the very act of martyrdom it celebrates give heroic life to the movement.”<sup>37</sup> Geographically closer to Croatia, Romanian legionaries in one of their most well-known “death team” songs declared that “death, only the *legionarii* death/ is a gladsome wedding for us.”<sup>38</sup> In a similar way, the burials of Ustasha warriors such as Babić and Pogorelec can be seen as funerals-as-weddings insofar as they united fighters in death that had been together in life and presenting them as akin to a married couple, a practice that was not uncommon when Ustasha fighters or Croatian soldiers had fallen together.<sup>39</sup>

Although Babić and Pogorelec were buried in separate ceremonies at Mirogoj, in both the public imagination and Ustasha propaganda martyrdom culture they were imagined as partners predetermined to perish together. This partnership between the two men drew on two aspects which significantly influenced Ustasha gender politics: first, traditional Balkan ideas about male kinship connected to the practice of *pobratimstvo*, a form of fictive ritual brotherhood which involved a ceremony resembling a male marriage, and second, the homo-social culture of fascism which was amplified within the Ustasha movement by the years its émigrés spent in harsh conditions in Italian overseas camps and the generally young and unmarried status of most members of the militias.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125–6.

<sup>38</sup> Zev Barbu, “Rumania,” in *Fascism in Europe*, ed. Stuart J. Woolf, revised edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 162–3.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g., the joint funeral notice for Vojko Novak and Ivan Schlehan, *Nova Hrvatska*, 9 February 1943.

<sup>40</sup> Regarding the practice of *pobratimstvo*, see e.g., M. Edith Durham, “Some Montenegrin Manners and Customs,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 39, nos. 1–6 (January–June 1909): 85–96; idem, *Some Tribal Origins, Laws and Customs of the Balkans* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928); Dinko Tomašić, *Personality and Culture in Eastern European Politics* (New York: George W. Stewart, 1948). If these accounts suffer from an orientalist framing typical of the time in which they were written, a more recent interpretation of this practice is provided in Wendy Bracewell, “Ritual Brotherhood across

The partnership or ritual brotherhood of Babić and Pogorelec was a distinctive part of the memory culture which grew up around the two men. According to *Hrvatski radio list* which put the images of the deceased warriors on its front cover surrounded by an edging of thorns to symbolize the arduous journey they had set out on together they were martyrs whose “two wreaths of thorns crowned the Independent State of Croatia.” Inside the magazine, there were photographs of their funerary processions and burial ceremonies at Mirogoj.<sup>41</sup> On the journey of the remains of the two men to Zagreb, their bodies were displayed to the public in open caskets in Banja Luka though at slightly different times, courtesy of the Ustasha centre leader of Bosanska Krajina, Viktor Gutić.<sup>42</sup>

However, more broadly the commemorations of Pogorelec’s death and the coverage of his funeral emphasized his brotherhood with Babić even as it followed much of the same rhetorical trajectory of sacralization, revenge and predestination as his partner’s funeral. Pogorelec was buried at Mirogoj on 9 July. That evening’s edition of *Hrvatski narod* described how “the dead body of the fearless warrior Antun Pogorelec who fell victim to perfidious criminal hands” was laid to rest. The newspaper stressed that although he was dead, “his spirit is alive; he comes among us. Those who killed Ante Pogorelec only killed his body but did not kill his spirit.” The burial was preceded by a mass after which his body “was carried to eternal rest, constructed into the foundations of the Independent State of Croatia.” The coffin, adorned with flowers and large candles, was guarded by fellow PTS fighters while two former political prisoners who had been in jail with him also paid their respects. Among the wreaths on his coffin from “brother Ustashas” in the PTS and elsewhere was a “beautiful” one from “brother prisoners” composed of flowers in the form of the Croatian national coat of arms and the large “U” sign surrounded by a “symbolic crown of thorns” while workmates at the City Electricity Company where he had been employed sent a “final farewell to the Ustasha fighter and martyr.” As an Ustasha band played a funerary lament, his coffin was brought to the front of the mortuary and Vilim Cecelja said a prayer of absolution over his dead body. His coffin was then carried to the grave by six Ustashas accompanied by militia members, family relatives and former fellow prisoners. At the front of the funeral posses-

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Frontiers in the Eastern Adriatic Hinterland, 16th -18th centuries,” *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 3 (2016): 338–58.

<sup>41</sup> “Dva trnca vijenca,” *Hrvatski radio list*, 20 July 1941. Shortly afterwards, this radio listings magazine was renamed *Hrvatski krugoval*, in line with the linguistic policy of the Ustasha state which deemed “radio” to be a “foreign” and “uncroatian” word.

<sup>42</sup> “Počast banjalučkih Hrvata palom Ustaši Miji Babiću koji je junački pao u borbi sa srpskim četnicima,” *Hrvatska krajina*, 6 July 1941; “Prema ubojicama ne smije biti obzira” and “Nekoliko tisuća Banjalučana odalo je počast palom heroju Anti Pogorelcu,” *Hrvatska Krajina*, 9 July 1941.



sion, an Ustasha carried a cross. At the entrance to the cemetery, Cecelja carried out a blessing for Pogorelec's remains and then the funeral party proceeded to his final resting place located next to the grave of his fictive partner in life and death, Babić.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, as with Babić, the description of Pogorelec's funeral in *Novi list* combined the concept of life after death and the reproductive power of blood with the idea of the Ustasha as a "blood sacrifice," and a narrative which framed his burial as a wedding of the dead, a funeral-as-wedding:

The wax dripped from the heavy candles; the sacred silence filled the hall of death covering a secret second life and in the middle in an agony of flowers... There he lay, the warrior and martyr, the Ustasha Ante Pogorelec, dead... Dead?... The Ustasha Antun Pogorelec remains among us he remains with all of those who in the greatness of the sacred and eternal Croatia seek the greatest idea of life, which seeks satisfaction in the greatest sacrifice, and in blood the great future of Ustasha Croatia. Ustasha Antun Pogorelec is with us! He is with us in every twitch of the Croatian organism and this mortuary atmosphere and heavy smell of candles and flowers is just a quiet honour to a great blood sacrifice who sacrificed himself for the Poglavnik and Ustasha Croatia... To the sad sound of music Pogorelec approached his own grave to be soothed forever in the blood of the liberated Croatian soil... There at the freshly dug grave stands an entire hillock of flowers on the grave of Mijo Babić. We noticed over there one wreath: oak leaves and in the centre a Croatian coat of arms and the great letter U crowned with thorns. The symbol of the Ustasha journey which the two martyrs Babić and Pogorelec have passed through. It was a journey of bravery and a journey of Ustasha thorny endurance. The journey is finished: one lies in his grave and the other Ustashes carry ever closer to his open grave.<sup>44</sup>

Shortly before he set off with Babić on their fateful journey, Pogorelec had written a letter to the editor of his local Virovitica newspaper, *Hrvatski tjednik*, thanking him for a recent commemorative issue dedicated to the memory of his nephew Josip Begović, now incarnated as one of the most important pre-liberation Ustasha martyrs. An editorial in the newspaper used Pogorelec's death as a rallying cry for the continued cleansing of Croatian soil which Pogorelec and Babić had begun. In such a way, their sacrifices would not be in vain.

So, Pogorelec is no more. Begović left and then his mother and now finally the third in a row from the same family, our Antun Pogorelec. The blood-thirsty hydra sought yet one more sacrifice. He contributed himself. The third from one family. Is there any solace here? Maybe. But if there is, it cannot be of

<sup>43</sup> "Posljedni put ustaše Ante Podgorelca," *Hrvatski narod*, 9 July 1941.

<sup>44</sup> Bu and Po, "Ustaša Antun Pogorelec – s nama je! Ustaška krv izgradjuje ustašku Hrvatsku," *Novi list*, 9 July 1941.

the everyday conventional sort. Simply this sacred aim for which the victim fell, this sacred aim alone is the condition for reconciliation. Virovitica is once again in black. It is in black again for its great sons, warriors, who with the greatest of their gifts, their lives, with the greatest sacrifice, placed themselves on the altar of love for the homeland. Once again from the bloody Croatian crown drops of blood have been shed – perhaps not the last. Perhaps. But if they are not, let the insatiable monsters, the bloodthirsty monsters, know that their end is near. The Ustasha race has crushed the Chetnik monster, the monster thirsty for martyred Croatian blood; this monster is still crawling, crawling and showing the last of its twitches. There will be some, perhaps, that the monster will poison in the last of its fury, to bring it death, but then – then it will experience the aim of the heroic Ustasha Pogorelec, and the monster will once and for all lie crushed.<sup>45</sup>

### *Pogorelec, Babić and the Mimetic Ustasha Life Cycle*

The Ustasha life cycle was mimetic in two senses. First, Ustasha mass killing was mimetic since it sought to perform on the bodies of its Serb victims the mutilations, tortures and indignities that Ustasha propagandists insisted had been inflicted on its own activists in interwar Yugoslavia by the Serbian-led regime. After spontaneous uprisings erupted in reaction to Ustasha atrocities, slain Ustasha militia men were buried with extensive ritual, the alleged tortures they had endured before death described in great detail and then used to mobilize public opinion in support of the state's campaign of mass killing by reframing death squad members as defenceless, young and therefore innocent victims of "wild" and "primitive" Balkan hordes.<sup>46</sup> The Ustasha life cycle was also mimetic in the sense that martyrdom culture involved a restaging of the past. Not only did commemorations of the Ustasha dead frequently involve the rerunning of the different stages of their own life cycle in flashback – a recurring theme of Ustasha martyrdom literature as well as obituaries and eulogies<sup>47</sup> – but for the

<sup>45</sup> "Draga uspomena na Antuna Podgorelca" and "Opet jedan! Da li zadnji?...," *Hrvatski tjednik* 3, no. 27 (12 July 1941): 3. The discourse framing the state's Serb population as a filthy and insatiable Chetnik monster poisoning and sticking its claws into a pristine and pure Croatian body, whether individual or collective, was a recurring motif in Ustasha rhetoric. See Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 77, 326.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Franjo Rubina, *Tri mjeseca pod crvenom zvijezdom: s "Vražijom divizijom" za partizanima po Grmeču* (Zagreb: Nova Hrvatska, 1943), 96–8; Vilim Peroš, "Život i djelo pjesnika Josipa Križanaca," in Josip Križanac, *Junačka djela Jure viteza Francetića u stihovima* (Zagreb: Nova Hrvatska, 1943), 53–55.

<sup>47</sup> See e.g., Vilim Peroš, "Između života i smrti," *Ustaša* 13, no. 1 (8 January 1943): 5; Sa-lih Alić, "Smrt ustaše Salke," *Ustaški godišnjak* 2 (1943): 302–303; "Nad grobovima naših mučenika," *Ustaša* 13, no. 41 (11 October 1942): 5; "Primjer kako treba ljubiti svoj narod i

movement the real, existing funerals of fallen Ustashas – accompanied by empty caskets and catafalques in the case of more illustrious Ustasha martyrs – were often followed in subsequent years by fictive funeral masses in which the dead were once again re-remembered. As a result, the deaths of martyrs were constantly being re-enacted in the public consciousness.<sup>48</sup>

The memory culture which grew up around Babić and Pogorelec replicated many elements of this pattern and lasted long after their official funerals. These included obituaries and tributes in party journals and newspapers; profiles in mass-market tabloids; poetry collections; and Catholic masses, reflecting the state's wider cultural politics of martyrdom. In fact, the daily Zagreb newspaper *Nova Hrvatska* published a profile marking the sixth-month anniversary of their passing.<sup>49</sup> More significant commemorations marked the first anniversary of their deaths, many imbued with a chiliastic fervour which framed their martyrdom as not merely preordained, but desired by the two men themselves. In July 1942, a special commemorative issue of the Ustasha worker's newspaper *Hrvatski radnik* was dedicated to Babić in recognition of his background as a former mechanic. In his obituary, Marijan Snidaršić described him as an Ustasha-worker whose materially deprived childhood had been a school of life from which he had emerged "with chiseled, calm and firm characteristics." In 1923, he recalled, he had come to Zagreb as an apprentice mechanic and become involved in militant nationalist politics and consciousness-raising among working-class youth, becoming their "apostle." As an Ustasha worker, he also led an unceasing struggle against "the sworn enemies of humanity – world capital and Bolshevism," preparing the "Ustasha revolution" as a "worker warrior." According to Snidaršić, after the "national revolution" of 1941 Babić had declared to his fellow workers that his only wish was to live to see a "liberated" Croatia with the Poglavnik at its head, adding that it was easy "to die now when I have fulfilled my wish." He fell, Snidaršić claimed, "with that well-known smile on his lips which never left him even when he was suffering most." However, even Snidaršić's tribute could not resist making oblique references to Babić's role in the implementation of anti-Serb terror; the deceased Ustasha, he added, had told his fellow workers that they must work day and night to construct the new state and remove "all the consequences" of decades of "backwardness."<sup>50</sup>

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domovinu: junačka smrt jurišnog obkoparskog poručnika Ratimira Šega," *Nova Hrvatska*, 13 January 1943.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g., "Zadušnice za pok. dra Antuna Ilika i Jelenu Šantić," *Nova Hrvatska*, 18 November 1943.

<sup>49</sup> See e.g., "Navršilo se pol godine od smrti: Mije Babića i Antun Pogorelca," *Nova Hrvatska*, 31 January 1942.

<sup>50</sup> Marijan Snidaršić, "On će vječnoj ostati velik u srcima hrvatskih radnika," *Hrvatski radnik* 14, no. 27 (9 July 1942): 3.

The same edition of *Hrvatski radnik* carried a report of a mass that had been held for Babić at the church of Saint Blaž in Zagreb on 4 July 1942, in memory, of a warrior who had perished “fighting zealously to the last breath of his duty and defending his people from the enemy who had burnt and plundered Croatian villages.” The mass and eulogy were led by Nikola Šabić, a chaplain of the Black Legion militia; among the prominent mourners were activists of worker youth groups who also visited his grave the next day from their workshops in Zagreb and outlying villages. A speech by the head of the Office for the Protection of Working Youth set out the important events from Babić’s life, including the posthumous award of the Silver Medal and the conferring of the title of knight on the anniversary of his death by the Poglavnik in recognition of his “selfless and self-sacrificing Ustasha labour.” The worker youth then raised a chant of glory to Babić and lingered at his graveside, “drawing strength” for their own “still greater and arduous work” for the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>51</sup>

By contrast, the eulogy published in *Nova Hrvatska* for Babić was more explicit about his cleansing in the lead up to his death even while it maintained the myth of his death as one foretold. He had been, it wrote, among the movement’s “elite warriors and most conscious idealists.” Imbued with the “heroism of the Croatian soil,” from the first days of the Serbian “reign of terror” he had contributed incalculably to the Croatian “liberation struggle” through his “revolutionary Ustasha activism.” Having endured so many sacrifices for the establishment of an independent Croatian state, more than anyone, Babić had the right to expect a holiday or, at the very least, a little rest.

But he could not relax; he could not rest until the whole of Croatia was liberated. He knew that in the southern regions of Croatia a struggle was being waged with Partisans and bandits. Mijo Babić did not think long about it: he took a gun in his hands and hand grenade and set off to the battlefield. In one assault, Ustasha captain Mijo Babić fell, punctured by enemy bullets. Mijo Babić fell, he fell in his liberated homeland; he fell in a battle with the enemies of Croatian liberation. He fulfilled his final wish which he once stated thus: “I would like to perish in the liberated homeland, in a struggle on the battlefield...”

Inspired by the “sacredness” of the Ustasha liberation struggle, Babić, the article continued, had set off in the footsteps of the “revolutionary” Eugen Kvaternik. As such, he was a “living example to all warriors,” a “model fighter,” a figure of “iron” significance who embodied “Ustasha strength” and a “radiant example” of “Ustasha heroism.” If Babić had fallen on the “path of struggle” for the liberation of the Croatian people, his spirit, the newspaper predicted, would “continue to live in our thoughts and his image continues to live in all our hearts.”

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<sup>51</sup> “Svečane zadušnice za ustaša-radnika Miju Vitez Babića,” *Hrvatski radnik* 14, no. 27 (9 July 1942): 3.

His image would "illuminate the paths of our own struggle." His life and death would therefore serve as a template of how to struggle and perish for the "liberated homeland."<sup>52</sup>

Sacralized discourses were also apparent in the obituaries written for Pogorelec on the anniversary of his death. For the Ustasha student Stanislav Polonijo, writing in *Ustaša*, the police stations of Zagreb and prisons of Ada Ciganlija and Lepoglava in which Pogorelec and other Ustasha martyrs were brutally tortured were "stations of martyrdom." Polonijo likened Pogorelec's ideological beliefs to a religion, observing that "in Pogorelec they had found someone whose Ustasha faith they could not cool, and they could not take from him the memories which connected him to martyrs with whom he lived and who before his eyes went to their deaths, faithful to the Ustasha ideology, the Poglavnik and Croatia." Moreover, like Babić, Pogorelec fulfilled his "martyred and celebrated journey," passing through the biblical cycle of sacrifice, martyrdom and resurrection. "From a quiet worker-Ustasha through the tyrannical prisons in the shadow of the gallows," he wrote, "Pogorelec awaited the great moment of the Croatian resurrection and shortly after this he arose serene and clear and in the liberated homeland contributed the sacrifice of his life on the altar of the native soil...He will remain with us as an example and hope in days of despair and difficulty; he will remain with us now when in the serene and great Croatia we enjoy the fruits of his Ustasha work and martyr's death."<sup>53</sup> Hence, Pogorelec's death was framed as a predestined act for which his entire life was a preparation. This was also how popular poetry commemorated Babić and Pogorelec's deaths. For example, in his 1942 epic poem about the "heroic deaths" of Babić and Pogorelec, the peasant-poet Ante Lugonjić imagined the two warriors issuing orders to their comrades while expiring from their bloody wounds, dying side by side as they had fought and as they would later be buried: Babić, overcome by his gushing injuries and barely conscious, tells his men, "Don't think about your lives,/ don't think about your heads/just protect the Croatian state." Meanwhile, the expiring Pogorelec declares:

In truth, I have wanted for a long time  
to perish as a defender of the homeland.  
Thus, I will be a memory  
and future time will show,  
in this hour of my death.  
I am dying without tears in my eyes,

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<sup>52</sup> Pe., "Mijo Babić svijetao primjer idealnog ustaškog borca," *Nova Hrvatska*, 3 July 1942. Eugen Kvaternik was a nineteenth-century politician who, with Ante Starčević, created the Croatian Party of Right. He led a failed uprising against Austro-Hungarian rule in 1871 after which he was executed.

<sup>53</sup> Bu., "Mučenički put Antuna Pogoreleca," *Ustaša* 10, no. 23 (28 June 1942): 2.

I drink from the cup of death gladly.  
As an Ustasha I smile joyfully.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

The life cycle of the Ustasha state involved rituals of both killing and dying. The two axes of Ustasha martyrdom culture were linked symbiotically and provided essential context for each other. In the spring and summer of 1941, battalions of men from the elite party militias and death squads such as the PTS were sent into the Croatian and Bosnian countryside where, joined by local Ustashes and the so-called “wild” Ustashes, they perpetrated a wave of mass atrocities, for the most part against the state’s Serb minority in villages, settlements, and small towns throughout the state. One of the most striking aspects of these killing sprees was their ritualistic nature, characterized by torture, mutilation, dismemberment, and sanguinary methods of murder. As these “cleansing” campaigns stimulated an armed insurgency among the targeted population, increasingly resulting in casualties among young militia men, the disorder in the countryside was used as retrospective legitimation for the cleansing, with the slain death squad members reframed as virtuous and martyred victims of “primitive” Balkan bands.

A thick description of the funerary rites and memory culture which grew up around two of the most illustrious of the early militia martyrs – Antun Pogorelec and Mijo Babić – helps us understand more clearly the relationship between killing and dying in Ustasha culture. At the same time, it enables us to better understand the centrality of life cycle rituals in the project by the Ustasha movement to remake society and mediate the relationship between the state and individual. As can be seen with the deaths of Babić and Pogorelec, the movement made energetic efforts to recover the bodies of fallen martyrs in order to give them funerals and burials – and where that was not possible fictive, symbolic, sometimes annual “burials” – not only as a means of psychologically shoring up the fallen fighter’s comrades and providing comfort to their family, but also rooting the militias and hence the movement in local communities.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Ustasha activists at the local level took the practices associated with the burials of fallen martyrs seriously. Therefore, studying these funerals from the inside

<sup>54</sup> Ante Lugonjić, *Junačka smrt ustaša Mije Babića, Ante Pogorelca i njihovih ustaških drugova* (Dubrovnik: Dubrovačka hrvatska tiskara, 1941), 8, 12.

<sup>55</sup> Where it had not been possible to recover the corpse of a martyred Ustasha fighter, a catafalque or empty coffin was commonly used to represent their body at funerals and requiem masses [Zadušnice]. For an insight into the lengths the movement was prepared to go to in order to recover the bodies of fallen fighters, see, for example, the death notice by Milan and Blanka Šega for their son, Ratomir, an Ustasha lieutenant, *Nova Hrvatska*, 15 January 1943.



out allows us to see the Ustasha moral universe the way it appeared to many rank-and-file Ustasha members and militia men themselves.

As the cycle of ritualistic killing by Ustasha militias and martyrdom at the hands of insurgent groups shows, there was a dynamic relationship not only between the atrocities against rural Serb communities and the growing litany of fallen militia men, but between the ritualistic nature of the killings and the practices of martyrdom culture. The ways in which deceased Ustasha fighters were commemorated in fascist Croatia bore similarities with the Transylvanian wedding of the dead Gail Kligman encountered in 1980s Romania and the Palestinian funeral-as-wedding. In the Ustasha variant, funerals were employed as a means of binding dead militia men to each other, the nation and the movement in perpetuity while also representing a form of mirror propaganda in which the mutilations, dismemberments, tortures and atrocities performed on the bodies of the state's ethnic enemies by Ustasha death squad members were retrospectively transferred to the biographies and bodies of deceased perpetrators. To put it another way, it is only through studying the life cycle of Ustasha culture, in particular, the willingness of the Ustasha man of myth to die, that we will understand his desire to kill.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> As Ana Antić has observed, not all those who served in Ustasha militias were ideologically committed to the cause of the Ustasha movement or even conscious of the cause they were fighting for. See Antić, *Therapeutic Fascism: Experiencing the Violence of the Nazi New Order in Yugoslavia* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 97–142.

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