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The Multiple Lives of Slavica Flesch: Survival, Memory, and Restitution in the Shadow of the Holocaust

ABSTRACT: This article examines the strategies of survival, negotiation, and postwar restitution pursued by victims of state-sponsored violence in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) through a microhistorical analysis of the correspondence of the mixed Serbian–Jewish Oklobdžija–Flesch family of Zagreb. Focusing in particular on the experiences of Slavica Oklobdžija, the study reconstructs how members of a middle-class household navigated the racial legislation, administrative arbitrariness, and ideological contradictions of the Ustaša regime in an effort to preserve their lives, property, and legal standing. The article highlights the ambiguities inherent in NDH racial policy, especially in cases involving mixed marriages, which challenged the regime’s binary antisemitic worldview and nation-building project.

Drawing on wartime and postwar correspondence with state institutions, the article also traces Slavica’s attempts to obtain restitution after 1945, offering insight into bureaucratic attitudes toward Holocaust survivors and the families of victims in socialist Yugoslavia. By foregrounding the lived experience of one family, the article contributes to broader debates on everyday survival under genocidal regimes, the limits of racial ideology in practice, and the contested place of the Holocaust and Jewish survivors in postwar Yugoslav society.

KEYWORDS: Independent State of Croatia (NDH), Ustaša regime, Holocaust, mixed marriages, restitution, Jewish property, survival strategies.

“Which one of us had never written letters to the supreme powers?...If they are preserved, these mountains of letters will be a veritable treasure trove for historians,” observed Nadezhda Mandelstam about the millions of appeals, petitions, denunciations, confessions, and complaints ordinary citizens wrote to Soviet political leaders, party and government agencies, public figures and newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s.¹ Mandelstam's comments about Soviet supplicants can also be applied to the study of the Holocaust and its victims. Letters, diaries, and other written forms are vital in helping historians reconstruct the lived experiences of ordinary people in times of terror while also telling us important things about the societies in which they lived. In this regard, family archives can be particularly rich, if fragmentary and necessarily subjective, sources for understanding the everyday experiences of ordinary people during the Holocaust. As one of the earliest sites for the implementation of the Final Solution in Europe, the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) provides a particularly interesting context in which to explore the utility of personal document collections.² This article draws on the correspondence of one mixed middle-class Serbian-Jewish household in Zagreb, the Oklobdžija-Flesch family, consisting of Josip, a busi-

¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, „Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s”, *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (spring 1996), 78.

² There is a limited literature on the Holocaust in the NDH. Among notable studies of varying quality are Slavko Goldstein and Ivo Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016); Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011); Esther Gitman, *When Courage Prevailed: The Rescue and Survival of Jews in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945* (New York: Paragon, 2011); Marija Vulesica, „Being a Jew in Zagreb in 1941: The Life and Death of Lavoslav Schick”, in *Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Xavier Bougarel, Hannes Grandits and Marija Vulesica (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 233–267; Dallas Michelbacher, „Anti-Semitism and Economic Regeneration: The Ustasha Regime and the Nationalization of Jewish Property and Business in Sarajevo”, in *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia*, ed. Rory Yeomans (New York: Rochester University Press, 2015), 23–46.

nessman and senior executive in an industrial enterprise; his wife Slavica, a former opera singer who had converted to Judaism from Serbian Orthodoxy on marrying; and their young daughter, Renata. The article sheds light on how victims of wartime terror aimed to negotiate their survival in the state and even challenge its orthodoxies to claim restitution for their losses as marginalised, often barely-tolerated, and sometimes threatened citizens living in the twilight of the NDH. At the same time, drawing on Slavica's documents and correspondence as well as the oral testimony of her daughter about the multiple lives of Slavica – as pre-war opera singer and wife of an affluent businessman, concentration camp victim, and postwar Holocaust survivor – it explores the ambiguous and often contradictory relationship of the NDH and its ruling elite, the Ustaša regime, to race and nationality, and the often contrasting experiences of the victims of Ustaša terror – the Serbian, Jewish, and Roma “Other” – designated in law as non-citizens of the state and in Ustaša rhetoric and practice as “undesired elements.”

Remarkably, contained within Slavica's story – as a Jewish converttee of Serbian Orthodox origin – are most of the salient features of the Ustaša state's terror against the urban Serbian population: mass expulsion to Serbia or deportation to concentration camps and confiscation of their property and businesses; forced conversion to Catholicism under the statewide mass conversion programme; and finally reclassification from a racially inferior and dangerous “undesired element” to be eradicated, along with Jews and Roma, to a more ambiguous status as “Aryan” Croats of the Orthodox faith, even if different factions within the regime remained strongly divided on the fate of the Serbs.³ Likewise, Slavica's postwar interactions with Yugoslav officials

³ A full discussion of this central aspect of NDH nationality policy is beyond the scope of this paper. However, there is an extensive literature about antiserb terror in the early months of the state as well as the programme of mass conversion to Catholicism. See e.g. Filip Škiljan, *Organizirana prisilna iseljavanja Srba iz NDH* (Zagreb: Srpsko narodno vijeće, 2014); Filip Škiljan and Vlatka Dugački, „A Forgotten Aryanization: The Ustasha Regime, Middle-Class Serbs, and Economic Terror in Wartime Zagreb”, in *A Marketplace Without Jews: Aryanization and the Final Solution in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Rory Yeomans (London and New York: Routledge, 2025), 263–292; Mark Biondich, „Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Wartime Policy of Forced Religious Conversions, 1941–1942”, *Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 1 (January 2005), 71–116; Rory Yeomans, „Eradicating ‘Undesired Elements’: National Regeneration and the Ustasha Regime's Program to Purify the Nation, 1941–1945”, in *Racial Science in Hitler's New Europe, 1938–1945*, ed.

shed light on bureaucratic attitudes towards and the treatment of Holocaust survivors in postwar Yugoslavia and the struggle survivors and the families of victims experienced in their attempts to secure restitution.⁴ In so doing, it underlines the shortcomings of Yugoslav restitution for Holocaust victims as elsewhere in Europe, the role that ideological factors played in this, and the often arbitrary, bureaucratic, and hostile responses of institutions, individuals, and the state to survivors and families of victims. Not least, it brings into focus the complex attitude of socialist Yugoslavia in the late 1940s and early 1950s to the legacy of the Holocaust and Jewish survivors at the height of collectivization, Stalinisation and anti-Zionism in economics and society.

Finally, this chapter explores one of the most under-researched aspects of antisemitism and the Holocaust in the NDH: namely, the experiences of mixed Jewish-Gentile families and, in particular, the fate of Gentile spouses. Mixed marriages were not uncommon at the time the NDH was founded. Consequently, the state's harsh racial legislation which included a ban on matrimony between Jews and Gentiles had a devastating impact on mixed families, criminalising relationships and separating couples from each other

Anton Weiss-Wendt and Rory Yeomans (Lincoln, NA: Nebraska University Press, 2013), 200–236; *Pokatoličavanje Srba u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj: zbornik radova*, ed. Milan Radanović (Zagreb: Srpsko narodno vijeće, 2019); Michele Frucht Levy, „The Last Bullet for the Last Serb: The Ustaša Genocide against Serbs: 1941–1945”, *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 6 (2009), 807–837; Andrija Ljubomir Lisac, „Deportacije Srba iz Hrvatske 1941”, *Historijski zbornik* 9 (1956), 125–145; Tomislav Dulić, „Mass killing in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945: a case for comparative research”, *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 3 (2006), 255–281; Emily Greble Balić, „When Croatia Needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941–1942”, *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009), 116–38.

⁴ There is an extensive literature on the processes, promise, and failure of restitution for Jewish victims of confiscation in both postwar western and Eastern Europe. See e.g. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther, ed. *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict Over Jewish Property in Europe* (New York and Oxford: Bergbahn, 2007); Michael J. Bazyler and Roger P. Alford, ed. *Holocaust Restitution: Perspectives on the Litigation and its Legacy* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006); Shannon L. Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Constantin Goschler and Jürgen Lillteicher, ed. *„Arisierung” und Restitution: Die Rückerstattung jüdischen Eigentums in Deutschland nach 1945 und 1989* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002); Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–1948* (Cambridge and New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2014).

across ethno-religious lines. Slavica's marriage was somewhat atypical in this regard since she had been brought up in the Serbian Orthodox faith and had converted to Judaism to marry her husband. By contrast, surviving petitions on behalf of Jewish spouses suggest that many marriages between Jews and Gentiles conducted by the time the NDH was established were between Jewish men and Catholic women, with the marriage performed according to the rites of the Catholic Church and the Jewish husband converting to Catholicism before marriage. Nevertheless, what Slavica's marriage did have in common with those of Catholic wives with Jewish husbands was that the very existence of their relationships struck at the core of the binary racial antisemitic ideology and nation-building programme of the Ustaša regime.



Studio portrait of Josip Flesch
(BiH AUPiPŽJ, private family collection)



Renata in formal winter clothing for a
studio photo (BiH AUPiPŽJ, private
family collection)



Slavica Oklobdžija and Josip Flesch
on their wedding day (BiH
AUPiPŽJ, private family collection)



Renata Flesch, Slavica and Josip's daughter, at
Christmas time (BiH AUPiPŽJ, private family
collection)



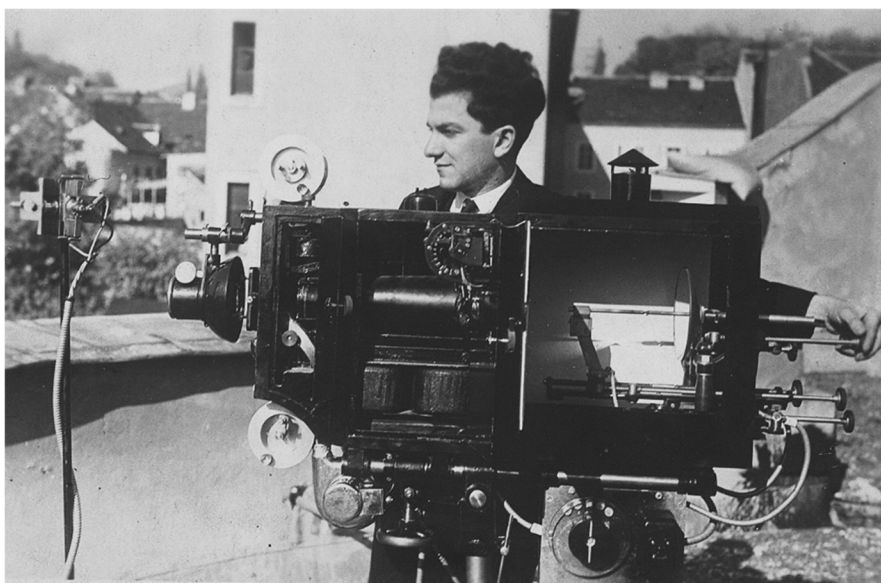
Josip and Slavica Flesch (right and far right) walking in Zagreb with friends
(BiH AUPiPŽJ, private family collection)



The extended Flesch family at a picnic
(Josip and Slavica nearest to the camera)
(BiH AUPiPŽJ, private family collection)



Josip Flesch posing for an outside
photograph (BiH AUPiPŽJ, private family
collection)



Teodor Flesch, Josip's younger brother, with his cinematographic equipment
(BiH AUPiPŽJ, private family collection)

Family Life, Ustaša Terror, and the Holocaust in Wartime Zagreb

Until 1941, the Oklobdžija-Flesch family lived a comfortable and privileged middle-class life. Renata Flesch (later Jakovljević), the daughter of Josip Flesch, recalled that for decades her father had been employed in a managerial role at the Croatia Cement Company factory in Zagreb, receiving a monthly pay of 7250 dinars, considered a very good salary for the time. Indeed, in 1939 he was made a member of the supervisory committee of the company and in the following year received a subvention of 7,000 dinars from company headquarters in Belgrade following a decision at the regular shareholders' meeting.⁵ Family life was punctuated by gatherings and parties of their extended Jewish family. Observing the rise of National Socialism and fascism, increasing antisemitism, and the occupation of European states by the Third Reich, Renata's mother had suggested to her father that the family emigrate to the United States. But her father had replied that whatever happened, no one would do anything to him because he was an honest and honourable Croat and had never done anything wrong. Her father had several siblings: two brothers, Hugo and Teodor, and two sisters called Dragica and Margareta, the former known by her nickname Šarika. Her younger uncle Teodor was involved in the technical side of cinematography while her older uncle, Hugo, ran a store on Ilica selling work shirts and suits; these were produced by electrical machines, a rarity at the time. Although Renata's father and Uncle Hugo were more prosperous than Teodor, nonetheless, they all made a good living and helped their parents and other family members out.⁶

This life came to an abrupt end with the invasion of Yugoslavia by Axis forces and the establishment of the NDH satellite state, under the ostensible rule of the virulently antiserb and antisemitic Ustaša regime. For some months, life continued albeit in an atmosphere of mounting legislative repression and functional terror against Serbs, Jews, and Roma; tightening legal de-

⁵ Bosnia and Hercegovina, Arhiv Udruženja potomaka i poštovalaca žrtava kompleksa ustaških logora Jadovno 1941 [hereafter BiH, AUPiPŽ]), Jakovljević-Flesch family archive, Notification to Josip Flesch from the headquarters of the Cement Company in Belgrade, 16 April 1940.

⁶ Renata Jakovljević interviewed by Dušan Bastašić, Banja Luka, 9 November 2009. All other recollections and memories by Renata Jakovljević are from the same interview unless otherwise cited.

crees and strictures regarding their movements and social and economic activities; and intensifying antisemitic propaganda. The early repressive measures in the first months of the state were draconian and included the expulsion of Serbs and Jews from their apartments in the upper part of Zagreb and other cities to what amounted to cramped open ghettos; the confiscation of the property of Serbs, Jews, and Roma and the appointment of Ustaša commissioners to their businesses; the mass purging of Serbian and Jewish workers and employees from state institutions and private enterprises alike; the freezing of their bank accounts and severe restrictions on access to valuables held in the safety deposit boxes of financial institutions; the cutting off of their telephone lines; and strict curfews and other limitations on their movement and access to staple goods.⁷ This had the effect of not only almost immediately reducing many affluent and middle-class Serbs and Jews to penury but also separating them from their Croatian fellow citizens.⁸ The main pillars of antisemitic and racial legislation defining membership of the national “Aryan” community were issued in the first weeks and months of the state’s existence. On 30 April 1941, for example, the NDH Ministry of Interior (Ministarstvo unutrašnjih

⁷ See e.g. Rory Yeomans, „Purifying the Shopfloor: Kastner and Oehler Department Store as a Case Study of Aryanization in Wartime Europe”, in *Modern Antisemitisms in the Peripheries: Europe and its Colonies 1880–1945*, ed. Éva Kovacs and Raul Cârstorcea (Vienna: New Academic Publishing, 2019), 235–297; idem, Rory Yeomans, „The Practice of Everyday Resistance: Ordinary People, Opposition, and Terror in Wartime Croatia”, in *Anti-Axis Resistance in Southeastern Europe, 1939–1945: Forms and Varieties*, ed. John-Paul Newman, Rade Ristanović, and Ljubinka Škodrić (Schöningh: Brill, 2023), 306–330; Michelbacher, „Anti-Semitism and Economic Regeneration”, 23–46; Zlata Živaković-Kerže, „Podržavljenje imovine Židova u Osijeku u NDH”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 39, no. 1 (2007), 97–116; Nada Kisić-Kolanović, „Podržavljenje imovine Židovi u NDH”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 30, no. 1 (1998), 439–52; Alma Huselja, „Citizens and Thieves: ‘Aryanization’ in Wartime Varaždin”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 38, no. 2 (autumn 2024), 165–82; Goran Miljan, „The Ustasha Youth and the Aryanization of Jewish Property in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945”, *European Holocaust Studies* 2 (2019), 113–32; Sanja Petrović-Gladanac, „When Economics was a Racial Endeavour: The Aryanization of Jewish Stores and Businesses in Wartime Sarajevo”, in *A Marketplace Without Jews*, 234–256; Hrvoje Volner, „‘Crumbs from the Table’: Aryanization, Ethnic Competition, and the Final Solution in Wartime Osijek”, in *A Marketplace Without Jews*, 302–345.

⁸ The term “Croatian” here denotes citizenship of the NDH, not ethnicity, reflecting the terminology the Ustaša regime used to categorise the state’s citizens.

poslova – MUP) introduced the Legal Decree on Racial Affiliation and the Legal Decree on the Protection and Honour of the Aryan Blood of the Croatian People which were essentially copies of the 1935 Nuremberg laws; they defined as Jewish and therefore non-Aryan anyone with three or more Jewish grandparents. For Roma, the laws were stricter still, defining as Roma anyone who had at least two Roma grandparents. These racial laws were supplemented by a law on citizenship which defined as a citizen an individual of Aryan origin who had not worked against the “liberation aspirations” of the Croatian people and who was willing to serve the Croatian state and people, provisions which excluded almost all Serbs, Jews, and Roma.⁹

Jews, like Serbs, were ordered to register with the authorities and those older than fourteen were also required to wear a yellow star on the left side of their chest indicating their Jewish heritage. An exception was made for Jews who were in mixed marriages on the presentation of marriage and baptismal certificates as well as for state and freelance officials during working hours. Jewish-owned or part-owned stores and businesses also had to be marked as Jewish enterprises while all state institutions were required to fill in questionnaires for employees with details not just of their racial heritage, but Aryan “conduct.” Jews who had changed their surnames to Croatian names since the First World War were ordered to revert to their original Jewish surnames.¹⁰ Finally, Jews were required to register their businesses, assets, and pro-

⁹ „Zakonska odredba o rasnoj pripadnosti”, *Narodne novine*, 30 April 1941; „Zakonska odredba o zaštiti arijske krvi i časti”, *Narodne novine*, 30 April 1941; „Zakonska odredba o državljanstvu”, *Narodne novine*, 30 April 1941. For the details, see Nevenko Bartulin, *Honorary Aryans: National-Racial Identity and Protected Jews in the Independent State of Croatia* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2013), 61–83; idem, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia* (Schöningh: Brill, 2013), esp. 148–58; Goran Miljan and Anders E.B. Blomqvist, „The Unwanted Citizens: The ‘Legality’ of Jewish Destruction in Croatia and Romania during World War II”, *Comparative Legal History* 11, no. 2 (2023), 226–255; Igor Vuković, „An Order of Crime: The Criminal Law of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), 1941–1945”, *Balkanica* 48 (2017), 289–342. For a comparative overview of racial legislation in the Independent State of Croatia and how it related to Jews specifically see e.g. Robert Blažević and Amina Alijagić, „Antižidovsko i rasno zakonodavstvo u fašističkoj Italiji, nacističkoj Njemačkoj i ustaškoj NDH”, *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci* 31, no. 1 (2010): 879–916.

¹⁰ „Naredba o promjeni židovskih prezimena i označavanju Židova i židovskih trgovinu”, *Narodne novine*, 4 June 1941.

property with the Office for Economic Reconstruction (Ured za obnovu privrede), later renamed the State Directorate for Economic Reconstruction (Državno ravnateljstvo za gospodarstvenu ponovu). They were also required to declare all property that had been taken from them from 10 April 1941 to 5 June while all future removal of property which had passed into regular domestic use had to be registered alongside an approval from the Ministry for National Economy.¹¹

One of the apparent anomalies of the Legal Decree on Racial Affiliation was that someone classified as non-Aryan who could demonstrate they had done something “meritorious” for the Croatian nation could write to the MUP and apply for “honorary Aryan” status. Although the legislation was mostly designed to enable the spouses and families of leading Ustaša to avoid being caught up in the racial legislation, thousands of Jews sent petitions asking for honorary Aryan status.¹² Most of these applications were rejected and of the few that were, many were later rescinded.¹³ A third major decree of 4 June 1941, the Legal Decree Regarding the Protection of the National and Aryan Culture of the Croatian People, banned Jews from having involvement in the social, youth, sports, and cultural life of the Croatian people.¹⁴ These repressive measures inevitably impacted ordinary Croatian citizens too, not only in the disruption of socioeconomic relations but also in their everyday lives: for example, the curfews which were placed on Serbs and Jews were also eventually extended to wider society in the name of combatting crime, vice and antisocial behaviour.¹⁵

¹¹ „Zakonska odredba o prijavi imetka židova i židovskih poduzeća”, *Narodne novine*, 5 June 1941; „Zakonska odredba o sprečavanju prikrivanja židovskog imetka”, *Narodne novine*, 5 June 1941.

¹² The literature specifically analysing Jewish petitions is sparse. See Rory Yeomans, „In Search of Myself: Autobiography, Imposture, and Survival in Wartime Croatia”, *S:IMON SHOAH: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*, 4, no. 1 (2017), 21–42. They are also discussed, though not systematically, in a number of other articles. See e.g. Yeomans, „Purifying the Shopfloor”; Volner, „‘Crums from the Table’”; Petrović-Gladanac, „When Economics was a Racial Endeavour.”

¹³ Of an estimated 2519 petitions on a variety of subjects by Jewish citizens, only 881 were preliminarily granted. See HR-HDA, NDH, RUR/ŽO, 16.252/3000 and 30068.

¹⁴ „Zakonska odredba o zaštiti narodne i arijske kulture hrvatskog naroda”, *Narodne novine*, 4 June 1941.

¹⁵ On this aspect of everyday life in the NDH, see Yeomans, „The Practice of Everyday Resistance”, esp. 320–28.

Petitions were one of the few avenues available to Jewish and non-Jewish victims of Ustaša persecution to negotiate their position in the state and the terror of the Ustaša regime. Jews and Serbs used them frequently, albeit often unsuccessfully, to secure the release of relatives, gain access to their bank accounts, ask for the return of property or, in the case of Jews, request honorary Aryan status. Likewise, Catholic Croatian women with Jewish husbands sometimes used petitions as a mean of appealing to the authorities for their spouses to have the same rights as “Aryan” Croats, pointing out, for good measure, that as the “Aryan” wives of Jewish husbands, they were negatively affected by the antisemitic legislation.¹⁶ Whether such petitions can be interpreted as acts of resistance against the Ustaša regime as Thomas Pegelow Kaplan and Wolfgang Grüner have argued elsewhere is questionable: most such petition writers, in Croatia at least, were not seeking to challenge the state or its laws; rather, usually, they were just asking that an exception be made in the case of their families. Nonetheless, in the case of Catholic wives, at least, the simple act of writing these petitions and the demand that their husbands be seen as equal citizens, not to mention their refusal to abandon their marriages, can be interpreted as a challenge to the very basis of the legitimacy of the state of which they were citizens.¹⁷

It appears that Josip and his family were not directly affected by these repressive measures, however, until the day that they were arrested.¹⁸ This was possibly due to Josip’s key position in an important Croatian industry and his

¹⁶ See e.g. petition to the Croatian State Sabor, 14 May 1942, by a group of 40 wives of Jewish husbands in Osijek, HR-DAOS, NDH, Gradsko poglavarstvo Stefan Hefer, Javna djelatnost, razno, k. 9, unnumbered.

¹⁷ See the collection of essays in *Resisting Persecution: Jews and Their Petitions during the Holocaust*, ed. Thomas Pegelow Kaplan and Wolfgang Grüner (New York: Berghahn, 2020).

¹⁸ In the archives there are several petitions from individuals with the surname Fleisch (Fleš) asking for honorary Aryan status or appealing for the release of relatives from the Jadovno-Slana-Metajna concentration camp complex but it seems that they were not related to Josip Fleisch or his extended family. See e.g., AJGSP, FDZ 4, no. 1042, Josip Fleš to the Directorate of the Ustaša Police, Jewish Section (Ravnateljstvo ustaškog redarstva/Židovski odsjek – RUR/ŽO), 14 July 1941; AJGSP, FDZ 4, unnumbered, Hugo Fleš to the RUR/ŽO, undated but probably June 1941; AJGP, FDZ 4, unnumbered, August Cerer to the Main Ustasha Headquarters, Jewish Section (Glavni Ustaški Stan, Židovski odjel), 30 May 1941, [names spelled as in original].

marriage to a woman who had an indefinite racial status as a member of an “undesired” ethnic group but one which, unlike Jews and Roma, was never formally classified in law as a non-Aryan population – even if the terror they suffered at the hands of the Ustaša regime was often indistinguishable from that experienced by these other two undesired populations and, initially, at least even more violent in some important respects. Renata recalled that on the day that she and her mother were arrested, a German Gestapo agent arrived at their house in Trešnjica while simultaneously her father was arrested at his office. Renata and her mother were ordered to get ready and were informed they would be transported to work on the draining of Lovačko polje, one of the many civil engineering projects the Ustaša regime, under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Works, was preparing as part of the modernization and industrialization of the state. Initially they were taken to the Zagreb fairground (Zagrebački zbor), where an international trade fair was held annually and where many Serbs and Jews in Zagreb were taken before being deported.¹⁹ The realization about what lay in store for them only came in retrospect, however. At the time, Slavica assumed they would be fine as they had never broken any laws or committed any crimes. Although Slavica and Renata were there alone initially, other members of the family later joined them. Likewise, when Josip was arrested, he protested that he was an honest Croat. Once all the men and women had been gathered together with their children at the fairground, Ustaša police took the men away, including Josip; he was deported to the Jadovno-Slana-Metajna concentration camp. Slavica and Renata were deported to the same camp complex but under separate transport. In winter 1941, in response to growing protests from Croatian women about the deportation of their Jewish husbands to concentration camps, the Directorate of Ustaša Police issued instructions to municipal authorities in towns such as Djakovo that “Jews in mixed marriages with Aryans must be excluded from deportations.”²⁰ Tragically, such orders came too late for Josip Flesch and his family.

Slavica and Renata were placed in a cattle cart before being transported to Gospić, a journey that lasted three nights. There were seven armed Ustaša on the train with them and maybe as many as a hundred or more Jewish and Ser-

¹⁹ Škiljan and Dugački, „A Forgotten Aryanization”, 263.

²⁰ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, no. 7166, Directorate of the Ustaša Police to the regional oblast in Djakovo, 19 November 1941.

bian female prisoners, but at no point did the women try to overpower them. The journey was “terrible”: the deportees, who were crammed up against each other, did not receive any water nor did they have access to toilet facilities. Instead, they had to relieve themselves in the wagon; some passengers died en route from lack of ventilation. The deportees arrived in Gospić at night, still escorted by these seven Ustaša. Slavica later remarked that if the party of deportees had consisted only of one hundred Serbian women, they would have eaten the guards. The female prisoners walked seven kilometres to the camp, and, along the way, the women called out to others in the party that they knew or recognised so that no one would collapse. During the journey, the women and children were housed in a stable and the local prison in Gospić and from there transported by truck to Karlobag and then to Pag to the Metajna concentration camp. The camp was surrounded by wire, with Ustaša guards on the other side. The female prisoners sometimes gave money to the guards to buy corn for them so that they had something to eat but, in response, the guards entered the camp and beat the women, keeping the money for themselves. On one particularly wrenching occasion, Slavica saw her husband, Josip, who had been incarcerated at the nearby men’s Jadovno camp. For one brief moment she looked at Josip: all she could see was the male prisoners transferring stones from one pile to another for no apparent purpose. This was a characteristic of the Jadovno camp, the intention of which was to exhaust the male prisoners so that they would expire more quickly.²¹ Slavica and Josip did not have any contact during this brief exchange of glances and nor could they share any words because Josip was a long way away. “That was the last time that we saw him. After that, we never saw each other again,” Renata stated. Slavica later told her daughter that when she saw him, “he clutched his heart and he was in tears.”²²

The Wartime Experiences of Slavica Flesch

For Slavica and her daughter, the formative part of their war experience was defined by imprisonment in a series of concentration camps. In

²¹ Studies of the Jadovno-Slana-Metajna camp complex include Ante Zemljarić, *Haror i sudbine: Ustaški koncentracijski logori Slana i Metajna na ostrvu Pagu – 1941* (Belgrade: Četvrti Jul, 1988) and Đuro Zatezalo, *Jadovno – kompleks ustaških logora 1941: zbornik dokumenata* (Belgrade: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2007).

²² Interview with Renata Jakovljević, Banja Luka, 9 November 2009.

all, Slavica and Renata passed through seven Ustaša-run concentration camps, including Kruščica, Karlobag, Metajna, and Loborgrad. Being extremely young at the time, Renata was not able to recall her time in all of the camps so some of her memories were probably influenced by what other people, including her mother, told her. Nevertheless, her strongest memory of the period was of her mother constantly crying, so much so that she feared for her life. After the dissolution of the Jadovno camp complex, the men were sent through Gospić to the newly-established Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška concentration camp and the women to Kruščica, the former journey which Renata aptly described as “one without return.” While Renata did not remember much about her time in Kruščica, she did recall that she was always hungry and that her mother who was well built, had a strong constitution, and weighed 105 kilos when she entered the camp, weighed less than half that by the time she left due to malnutrition. She had more meaningful memories of the final concentration camp, Loborgrad, to which they were transferred directly from Kruščica. Loborgrad was designed primarily for the internment of Jewish women and their children from Bosnia and northern Croatia although a small number of its 1500 prisoners were Serbs. In this regard, Renata’s mother occupied an ambiguous space, being both a convert to Judaism and an ethnic Serb by origin. Conditions in the camp were appalling and although there were no mass killings during their time, there was a typhus epidemic; the staff filled a large, specially-constructed pit not far from the camp with the bodies of dead prisoners although it was only later that Renata understood its significance.²³

Slavica and Renata, along with most of the non-Jewish prisoners, were released in April 1942 due to the intervention of Diana Budisavljević, an upper middle-class philanthropist and activist of Austrian origin, who, together with Kamilo Bresler, an official in the wartime Croatian state’s health ministry, and a team of Red Cross nurses, successfully lobbied for the evacuation of large numbers of Serbian children from the camps – or “reception centres” as Ustaša propaganda termed them – which the state had established for them as well as Jewish and Roma children. Budisavljević and her team found the children in a deplorable condition, ravaged by disease, starvation, and abuse, while others were dead; many were so weak by that stage they did not survive

²³ Ibid.

the journey from the camps.²⁴ The majority Jewish prisoners in Loborgrad were not released. In August 1942, the Jewish women and their children were transported to Auschwitz where they were exterminated.²⁵

On 23 April 1942, Karlo Heger, commander of the Loborgrad and Gornja Rijeka camps, ordered the release of Slavica Flesch from internment on the orders of the Directorate of the Ustaša police to be allowed to return to her home and to have free passage throughout the territory of the Independent State of Croatia.²⁶ However, the release of Slavica and her daughter did not mean the end of the threat of incarceration or the return of a semblance of familial normality. When they were released from Loborgrad and returned to Zagreb, they

²⁴ On Diana Budisavljević's wartime humanitarian activism, see Josip Kolanović, ed., *Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv i Javna ustanova Spomen Područje Jasenovac, 2003); Milan Koljanin, „Akcija Diane Budisavljević”, *Tokovi istorije* 3 (2007), 191–207; Marina Ajduković, „Djelovanje Diane Budisavljević: Rad s djecom u 2. svjetskom ratu”, *Ljetopis socijalnog rada* 13, no. 1 (2013), 101–114; Gavro Burazor, „Prilog istraživanju humanitarne akcije Diane Budisavljević”, *Topola* 3, no. 3 (2017), 47–63; idem, *Humanitarna akcija Diane Budisavljević 1941–1945* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2013); Jasmina Tutunović Trifunov, „Akcija Diane Budisavljević (1941–1945)”, in *Istraživanja i memorijalizacija genocida i ratnih zločina*, ed. Jovan Mirković (Belgrade: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2012), 53–93; Nataša Mataušić, *Diana Budisavljević: Prešućena heroína Drugog svjetskog rata* (Zagreb: Profil, 2020).

²⁵ Regarding the history of the Loborgrad concentration camp, see Carl Bethke, „Das frauen- und kinderkonzentrationslager Loborgrad in Kroatien (1941–1942)”, in *Logori, zator i prisilni rad u Hrvatskoj/Jugoslaviji 1941.–1945, 1945.–1951: zbornik radova*, ed. Vladimir Geiger and Martina Grahek-Ravančić and Marica Karakaš-Obradov (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010), 57–73. See also Zdravko Dizdar, „Logori na području sjevernozapadne Hrvatske u toku drugoga svjetskog rata 1941–1945. godine”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 22, nos. 1–2 (1990), 83–110; Narcisa Lengel-Krizman, „Sabirni logori i dječja sabirališta na području sjeverozapadne Hrvatske 1941–1942”, in *Sjevernozapadna Hrvatska u NOB-u i socijalističkoj revoluciji: zbornik*, ed. Ljubo Boban, Zlatko Čepo, Ivan Jelić, Nikola Radanović, and Fabijan Trgo (Varaždin and Zagreb: Zajednica općina memorijalnog područja Kalnik and Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, 1976), 884–893.

²⁶ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, unnumbered, Release form for Slavica Flesch, née Oklobdžija, signed by Heger, 23 April 1942. On Heger, see Carl Bethke, *(K)eigne gemeinsam Sprache? Aspekte deutsch-jüdischer Beziehungsgeschichte in Slawonien, 1900–1945* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 307–309; Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, ed. *Der Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 9 Arbeitserziehungslager, Ghettos, Jugendschuttlager, Polizeihafllager, Sonderlager, Zigeunerlager, Zwangsarbeiterlager (München: C.H. Beck, 2009), 319.

discovered that their family home had been expropriated and assigned to an Ustaša officer – Rudolf Čvrljević, from Ljubuški – as was the case with many of the properties that had been confiscated from Jews and Serbs. It would be two years before they could gain access to the property; in the meantime, they stayed with a friend of Slavica's who lived on Maksimirska cesta since there was no family left on her husband's side. The friends they stayed with, the Zrnec family, owned a large house and ran a butcher's store which was closed for the duration of the war; in the meantime, they carried out some unspecified business for the Croatian army. It was while they were lodging here that Slavica and her daughter were arrested late one night in 1942 by the Ustaša Police and detained in the notorious prison at Petrinjska ulica for three days before being released, following the intervention of the Zrnec family. It later transpired, unknown to Slavica at the time, that several of her husband's relatives were also being incarcerated there although, unlike Slavica and Renata, none of them returned. It was after this incident that Slavica came under concerted pressure from local officials as a prominent woman of means and converted Jew to convert to Catholicism. She and her daughter were arrested once again as a clear warning that they should convert. Slavica initially resisted the pressure, insisting that she would not change her religion again. Nonetheless, the authorities informed her that if she did not convert, she would be unable to register herself or her daughter with the municipal authorities, lobby to secure her husband's release, or regain the family home, the documentation for which she only ultimately received in September 1944, enabling them to return home.²⁷

Eventually, Slavica relented and agreed to convert.²⁸ The Zrnec family's son advised her that she should also get her daughter "baptised," suggesting a Catholic priest, Ivan Posavec, the parish priest of Sveti Petar in Zagreb, who was a family friend and would be prepared to attest that Renata had been baptised without the knowledge of her father a few years after her birth in 1936.²⁹ According to Renata, the priest had asked Slavica if she was conver-

²⁷ Interview with Renata Jakovljević, Banja Luka, 9 November 2009.

²⁸ See excerpt from the Book of Conversions of the Roman Catholic parish of Sveti Petar in Zagreb confirming that Slavica Flesch née Oklobdžija, a housewife living at Maksimirska cesta 120, born Serbian Orthodox and later a convert to Judaism, converted to the Catholic faith under the Catholic chaplain Ivan Posavec on 30 May 1942.

²⁹ A letter addressed to Josip Flesch on 12 August 1942 („Predmet: Flesch, Renata, matični izpravak” 22.733.-I-2) on behalf of the city authorities informed Slavica Oklobdžija-Fle-

ting out of conviction, adding that Catholicism was the greatest religion in the world, to which her mother had replied that, on the contrary, she was converting out of necessity. Renata added that her mother felt she could be honest with the priest as a friend of the Zrnec family in a way that she could never have been publicly elsewhere without risk of arrest.³⁰ This episode in itself highlights an important feature of the functioning of terror in wartime Croatia. A narrow line, as Imre Rochlitz wrote in his memoirs, separating death from survival often rested on pure luck, favours and connections more than any kind of consistent ideological principle.³¹

Freed from any direct threat of deportation since she was now categorized as an Aryan woman, Slavica began her fight to regain the family's property and possessions, confiscated the previous year and, first and foremost, the release of her husband from Jasenovac. The process of reclaiming confiscated property was a complicated and protracted process which often ended in failure. In all cases, an application had to be submitted to the State Treasury and Office for Nationalised Property (Ured za podržavljeni imetak – UPI), usually delivered by hand, accompanied by a face-to-face interview. By contrast, in the case

sch that by order of the Ministry for Justice and Religion in Zagreb of 31 May 1942, the book of registries had been corrected to reflect the fact that “your daughter was baptised in October 1936.” BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, 3. This was obviously a ruse designed to protect Renata and her mother. It is not clear how common this kind of deception was but the production of counterfeit baptismal certificates or testimonies attesting to such, especially for Jews, almost certainly placed those involved in significant danger if it was uncovered.

³⁰ That refusing to convert to Catholicism could result in severe consequences for Serbs from the affluent urban middle classes, even in the late period of the NDH, is illustrated by the case of Mirjana Babunović-Dimitrijević. From a well-to-do, prominent Serbian Orthodox family in Sarajevo, in 1944, together with her aunt and mother, she was deported to Jasenovac on the orders of Maks Luburić after they refused to convert to Catholicism, perishing later that year. See entries for Mirjana Babunović-Dimitrijević, Jovanka Jovičić-Babunović and Mara Jovičić-Popović in Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card>. Last viewed 22 April 2025.

³¹ Imre Rochlitz with Daniel Rochlitz, *Accident of Fate: A Personal Account* (Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University, 2011), 92–3. Rochlitz's own story illustrates the role that happenstance played in the state well. As a teenage Hungarian Jewish refugee living with his family in Zagreb, he was himself rescued from Jasenovac concentration camp after a few weeks of incarceration in January 1942 and on the point of death by the extraordinary intervention of a high-ranking Nazi officer who knew the family well.

of the Oklobdžija-Flesch family, the return of their property was implemented relatively quickly. On 29 September 1942, only two months after she first visited the premises of the UPI, Ivo Barić, the head, announced that the agency had resolved Slavica's application, thereby ending the municipal authority's administration over the building she owned at Bosiljska ulica 6, "seeing as the appellant, according to the decree on racial membership, should be considered Aryan." As a result, the property was transferred back to her.³²

When Slavica and her daughter re-entered their apartment, they confronted a problem many of those who had managed to regain their property encountered: a residence stripped of its furniture and possessions. Indeed, Renata would later recall that when they moved back in, nothing remained except a portrait of her and her mother and a bathroom cabinet; in the meantime, the former Ustaša "tenant" had moved into the residential building next door. One of the reasons why this was a common experience for citizens who succeeded in reclaiming their property from the authorities was because while the new tenants were not always permitted to purchase the properties outright, they were given the opportunity to purchase much of the furniture, equipment, and valuables left by the former owners. And in the case of those who, like Slavica, had been deported to concentration camps, what remained behind was pretty much everything. This was true of Slavica's apartment which had been occupied up to then by Čvrljević, a member of the Poglavnik Bodyguard Battalion (Poglavnikova tjelesna bojna – PTB). Consequently, on 12 August 1943, the commander of the PTB, Vjekoslav Servatzy, sent Slavica a letter enclosing the key to her home from Čvrljević, requesting that she take over occupancy of the property and confirm that she had done so. The letter added that the decision of the UPI of 29 September 1942 "which you enclosed a duplicate of in your petition for the vacating and return of the residence *relates exclusively* to the building on Bosiljevska ulica 6 *and not the furniture* that sergeant major Čvrljević properly purchased and paid for. Its return is out of the question. I ask that if you consider that you have suffered damages, you take steps with the Office for Nationalised Property!"³³

³² BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, no. 31627/1942, Ivo Barić on behalf of the UPI to Slavica Oklobdžija-Flesch, 29 September 1942.

³³ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, no. 1488, „Flesch, Slavica: predaja ključeva stana od ust. zast. P.T.B. Čvrljevića”, 12 August 1943. Emphasis added.

The case dragged on for months as Slavica sought to secure the return of the furniture – or at least one part of it. The case was only definitively resolved in December 1943 when Slavica regained some of the more personal items of furniture. Meanwhile, the correspondence to Slavica from the UPI settling the dispute and quoting, in turn, the correspondence of Čvrljević himself, was revealing in terms of the ingrained antisemitic language of the state and its public servants, the shifting identity politics that governed state ideology, and the way that this determined the bureaucratic responses of the state. In particular, it highlighted the evolution in how the Serbian population living on the territory of the NDH was racially categorised by the Ustaša authorities, first as a racial, economic, and political enemy of the state that needed to be removed and then later reclassified as a barely tolerated, largely untrusted, but undoubtedly Aryan population. This was perhaps especially applicable to that section of the former Serbian urban elite such as Slavica and her daughter who had converted to Catholicism and had therefore “become” Croats.

Take, for example, the letter sent to Slavica by an official of the UPI, a certain Crnojević, on behalf of the Ministry of the State Treasury, on 16 December 1943, regarding her house and furniture. In it, Crnojević explained that he had learned from Čvrljević that he still had in his possession various items of furniture and moveable assets that were being used by him and had previously been in the ownership of “the Jew Josip Flesch from Zagreb, Bosiljevka ulica 6,” deported, he continued, to a concentration camp in 1941. Among the items were a black oak writing table, a black upholstered recliner, a standing lamp with two lights, and a granite writing set consisting of an inkwell, ashtray, and writing stand. Crnojević added that it had subsequently been established that all the items as well as all the assets were owned by his wife “who according to the decree on racial affiliation should be considered an Aryan woman.” Thus, he continued, according to a decision by the Office for Nationalised Property of 29 September 1942 all the moveable assets, consisting of household furniture, as well as the dwelling itself, should be returned to her. Crnojević added that as the items were her property and as Čvrljević had not purchased them from the UPI, he was requesting that Čvrljević return all the moveable assets.³⁴

³⁴ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, UPI to Slavica Flesch, 16 December 1943, 51105/43. pok.

During this period, as Slavica was seeking to regain ownership of the property expropriated by the state, she continued seeking information about the fate of her husband, doggedly appealing for his release. However, it was not until autumn 1942, shortly after she had regained access to her family home, that she received confirmation about what had happened to her husband and the devastating news that Josip had perished in the Jasenovac concentration camp nearly two years previously. On 5 October 1942, Branko Rukavina, the head of section II of the security police, wrote in reply to one of her letters that, according to the commander of the camp, he had passed away on 13 December 1941.³⁵ As the war ended and for a number of years following that, Slavica continued searching for and seeking information about the fate of her husband's relatives and ultimately discovered that as well as Josip, his two brothers had perished in Jasenovac. By contrast, the family never discovered where Josip's sister, Šarika, perished though it must be assumed that she did perish as no trace of her was ever found. Of the siblings, Margarita, married to a Croatian man, was the only one to survive.³⁶

Despite Josip's death, life continued and Slavica was confronted by more basic problems during this period such as how to survive economically after being reduced to penury and having little means of supporting herself and her daughter financially as a widow in a time of want, shortages, and a cost-of-living crisis. Yet, the confirmation of the death of her husband also ironically enabled Slavica to start the process of claiming Josip's life insurance policy. In June 1943, Slavica Flesch was able to obtain a transcript of the insurance policy her husband had taken out on 27 February 1923 through the Croatian branch of the Trieste Assicurazioni Generali. It stated that in the event of his death, the company would pay out 25,000 dinars as a lump sum capital with an annual interest of 1,392,50 dinars and that immediately following his death, his capital would be transferred to Slavica. The agreement also stipulated that the interest, if the insured individual lived until 5 March 1943, would be paid on a half yearly basis lifelong in subsequent instalments, of which the first payment was payable on 5 September 1943.³⁷ However, in

³⁵ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, no. 25353, Branko Rukavina, head of section II of the security police, to Slavica Oklobdžija-Flesch, 5 October 1942.

³⁶ Interview with Renata Jakovljević, Banja Luka, 9 November 2009.

³⁷ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, The details of the agreement can be found in Osiguravajuća isprava br. 561715, 27 February 1923.

the context of the chaotic conditions of war, Slavica was unable to secure any payout from the insurance company before the state collapsed in May 1945. So, Slavica and her daughter Renata continued to live in grinding poverty in their apartment, enduring bone-chilling winters and malnutrition until the forces of the National Liberation Army (the Partisans) entered Zagreb.

*Post-War Nationalisation and the Jewish Experience
of “Socialist” Redistribution*

In the aftermath of World War Two and liberation, the embryonic Yugoslav state was engulfed by an atmosphere of revolutionary retribution and economic utopianism that was to have important implications for the small number of Jews that had survived the Holocaust. In the early weeks and months, Communist Party newspapers and journals, in particular, were focused on the need to “cleanse” society from domestic fascists and collaborators. This discourse was apparent across the new state but was especially present on the territories that had constituted the former NDH. Some journalists, such as the *Vjesnik* correspondent, Nikola Rubčić, were tireless advocates of this ideological correction measure. It was the patriotic duty of all Croatian citizens, he wrote, to unmask the fascist criminals in their midst concealing themselves in “dark corners.” To eliminate these “animals” was an expression of “human respect and love towards innocent victims, towards the homeland and this is the task of all of us.” In this sense, cleansing society by unmasking “Ustaša bandits” was the duty of every citizen.³⁸

An important element of the postwar campaign of punishment against those accused of collaboration was the confiscation of their property and nationalisation of their businesses. Although, over time, nationalisation was extended to almost all large and medium-sized businesses as part of the wider process of Stalinist collectivization, initially, the businesses of those accused of collaborating with the occupier were specifically targeted. To be accused or found guilty of collaboration did not necessitate having actively assisted the occupation forces or, in the case of wartime Croatia, the Ustaša regime: it was

³⁸ Nikola Rubčić, „Kaznimo zločince čovječnosti i narodne budućnosti”, *Vjesnik*, 29 May 1945, 1. See also „Njemački su fašisti s Pavelićem, Mihailovićem i Nedićem vojnički razbijeni ali nisu do kraja kapitulirali”, *Vjesnik*, 23 May 1945, 2.

enough for an individual to have kept a business running through the war even if, at the same time, they clandestinely hid resistance fighters and supplied the Partisans with materials under the nose of the Ustaša authorities. As the journalist Slavko Goldstein, a teenage Partisan and Holocaust survivor whose own father had perished in Jadovno, pointed out, this led to numerous injustices and punishment of individuals who had never been Ustaša sympathisers. This included numerous examples of class retribution against “bourgeois” business owners to progress the socialist revolution but was also marked by favouritism and inconsistent treatment on the basis of regional and party ties. The framework was established by an economic decree of 24 April 1945 from the antifascist national liberation committee of Croatia, the governing body of postwar Croatia. It stated that “economic assistance to the occupier and his auxiliaries, especially placing economic enterprises at the service of the occupier” was considered “a crime or offence against the national honour.” Punishment included the loss of all civil rights, a sentence of forced labour, and the confiscation of property.³⁹

Although the postwar programme of confiscation and nationalisation was not comparable in scope, intent, or violence to Aryanization in the NDH, there were similarities between them: both involved the confiscation of the assets of specific groups – before racial and now class-based – whose alleged power and influence was perceived to be obstructing the building of the new society and in both cases Jews were among the primary targets alongside class enemies. For example, Jewish businessmen who had kept their businesses operating throughout the war, albeit often under the management of Ustaša commissioners and trustees, were exposed in possibly staged denunciations by their own workers. In cases where the owners had been able to secure honorary Aryan status for the duration of the war, this was cited as an especially damning factor against them.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, in a bitter irony, some of the judges who presided over the confiscation of the property of “bourgeois” Jewish businessmen had been local Ustaša officials involved in the confiscation of Jewish and Serbian property in 1941 for whom an abrupt and zealous conversion to the socialist cause and active

³⁹ Slavko Goldstein, *1941: The Year That Keeps Returning*, trans. Michael Gable with an introduction by Charles Simich (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), 533, 531–44.

⁴⁰ See e.g., „Ni njih ne može mimoći ruka narodne pravde!”, *Vjesnik*, 18 July 1945.

participation in the nationalisation process represented a way of rewriting their own ideological histories. Elsewhere, former Ustaša commissioners testified before the courts that the Jewish owners and their families had collaborated with the occupiers. Communist officials also organized a series of show trials of Jewish managers of state enterprises such as the NaMa department store in Zagreb who were accused of embezzlement and corruption. One of those found guilty of “negligent fulfilment of his duties” was the director of the store, Wilhelm Klein. He had been a wartime Partisan but was nonetheless sentenced to death. His case was not exceptional and, in an atmosphere of revolutionary zeal and antizionism, other Yugoslav Jews, especially of significant means, including those who had actively aided the Partisan struggle, were executed as “collaborators.”⁴¹

Slavica's Fight for Postwar Restitution

Renata remembers vividly the day the war ended in Zagreb and the city was liberated. On that day, 8 May 1945, she recalls feeling extremely happy even though she was only a child. However, even at this late stage as the NDH was facing collapse, there was violence on the streets as the Partisans set fire to Ustaša ammunition dumps. Her mother made some bread that day, cut off a small piece for Renata, and gave the rest to some Partisans gathering in the yard below. She also recalls that on that day, in Zrinjevac, a high-ranking Partisan was shot at and killed by an Ustaša sniping from an attic. She retained vivid memories of watching at the house of a friend of her mother's in Maksimirska as the Ustaša retreated through the city towards Bleiburg trying to escape the advancing Partisans through Dubrava. The suffering Renata and her mother had endured did not end with the war. Despite the fact that in the middle of July 1945, Slavica finally secured permission to transfer

⁴¹ Zeev Milo, *Im Satellite Staat Kroatien: Eine Odysee des Überlebens 1941–1945* (Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 2010), ed. Roy Wiehn mit ausführlicher Beschreibung der historischen Ereignisse, 42, 46–8, 252–3; Hrvoje Volner, „Nationalization, Modernization, and Society in the Croatian Long Century”, in *National Identity and Modernity, 1870–1945: Latin America, Southern Europe, Central Eastern Europe*, ed. Viktoria Semsey (Budapest: Karoly Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, 2020), 145; Naida-Michal Brandl, „Jews between two totalitarian systems: property legislation”, *Review of Croatian History* 12 (2016), 106–27.

all the remaining furniture from Čvrljević's to her own apartment so she had a furnished home for the first time since 1941, material conditions remained extremely hard.⁴² Slavica received a very modest pay out from the pension fund which her deceased husband had continuously paid into since the mid-1920s, now renamed Sloboda and under quasi-state administration. Although the new administrators had taken over the assets of the former pension fund, they had not taken over its liabilities. Consequently, the amount that she, as a widow and beneficiary of her husband's will, received from the fund was far below what she should have received, and she got only the bare minimum. For a while, the two of them relied on packages from the United Nations Relief Organization which a relative received every month.⁴³

Over time, the political situation stabilised as the Communist Party established its power and patronage and embarked on the construction of a socialist state. Although Slavica was able to bring more goods home from the shops, the trauma and tragedies she had endured in the war years meant that "normality" existed as a superficial concept while she was daily confronted by the ghosts of her past and a deep sense of betrayal and pain. Like many other citizens of the People's Republic of Croatia who had endured material and personal losses at the hands of the Ustaša regime, at war's end, in 1946 Slavica submitted a report to the municipal public prosecutor accusing Čvrljević and others of having committed criminal acts against her by stealing her property and possessions. The public prosecutor, Valdo Ranogajec, decided that the district court should open proceedings against Čvrljević and others on the basis that the alleged criminal acts had been committed against the property of a private individual, in other words relegating the case to a civil dispute about property rather than a criminal case about war crimes.⁴⁴

Renata still has in her possession a box inside of which is a glass bowl her father had been given on the twenty-fifth anniversary of working for the Croatian Cement Company factory in 1936. Shortly before her birth, a party was held in his honour and the bowl inscribed with the signatures of all of his colleagues. But after the Ustaša came to power and the family was arrested

⁴² BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, no. 271, Telegram from the accommodation section of the military command of the city of Zagreb to Slavica Flesch, 17 July 1945.

⁴³ Interview with Renata Jakovljević, Banja Luka, 9 November 2009.

⁴⁴ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, „Rješenje”, I-3721/46, 12 August 1946.

and deported to the Jadovno-Slana-Metajna concentration camp, “no one helped. Not one of these signatories. And this is one of the reasons that my mother left Zagreb.” By 1947, living in Zagreb was becoming psychologically unsustainable and so when Renata was around ten years old, Slavica sold the house and moved to Daruvar because she “could no longer live in Zagreb” surrounded by individuals who had “never helped her and even obstructed any assistance,” albeit “relieved” that she and her daughter had survived, presumably to assuage their guilt. Worse, a number of them now held important positions in the socialist bureaucracy. By contrast, Slavica had family in Daruvar and there they would be surrounded by people who loved them. Consequently, they travelled to Daruvar to stay with relatives. Slavica’s family were tight knit and close and delighted to see her again, and she planned on buying a house there. However, while she was in Daruvar, she met up with a female cousin visiting from Banja Luka who suggested that she move there too as there were lots of jobs and she might be materially better off. Subsequently, then, Slavica moved to Banja Luka and purchased a house, finding work in an office. It was enough to live on and she liked her colleagues. With her own house, it was just enough to get by on and bring up her daughter.⁴⁵

Postwar socialist Yugoslavia was a tightly-controlled society and it was not a simple procedure to move to another city. After resettling, new residents had to register with the authorities and, in the case of Banja Luka, obtain a certificate from the Section for Internal Affairs of the Municipal People’s Committee confirming that their request for a temporary or permanent stay in the city had been approved; this was regulated by a special law on settlement in cities and was conditioned on the basis that those relocating had arrived in the city after 6 April 1941 (i.e. before the fall of the interwar Yugoslav state). On 25 March 1948, Slavica’s request to remain in Banja Luka was officially granted and so began the next of Slavica’s lives.⁴⁶

While Slavica endeavoured to build a new life for herself and her daughter, she struggled to secure restitution for her material losses, in particular access to her husband’s insurance scheme and his pension from the Croatia Cement Company factory. Her experience with the new factory administra-

⁴⁵ Interview with Renata Jakovljević, Banja Luka, 9 November 2009.

⁴⁶ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, no. 3121/48, Section for Internal Affairs of the City’s People’s Committee in Banja Luka to Slavica Flesch, 25 March 1948.

tors and nationalised pension scheme demonstrates the complex bureaucratic processes involved in securing access to reconstituted institutional funds and the challenges Holocaust survivors faced in the postwar period in achieving restitution. It also lays bare the dichotomy between the emotional distress of Holocaust survivors who were often the only members of their families to survive and their material day-to-day struggles on the one hand and the seemingly cold attitude of a cadre of bureaucrats whose responses were governed less by empathy than by a set of ideological and technocratic priorities.

As in many postwar European societies recovering from the devastation of war and genocide, petitions represented a common means by which survivors attempted to achieve restitution. Many of the petitions that were sent to the new Yugoslav authorities, especially the Countrywide Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Helpers, had two common aims. One was to raise an indictment against individuals involved in the material dispossession of the plaintiff or the arrest, deportation, and deaths of their loved ones. The other was to seek compensation for the losses they had endured. Thus, although the letters of bereaved widows and mothers (and less commonly male relatives) described harrowing details, they were often written with the help of neighbours, friends, and, especially, local officials who understood the established conventions such petitions were expected to use and could more accurately calculate a reasonable level of compensation. As a result, they tended to express personal losses in highly pragmatic terms.⁴⁷

Slavica's communications with the relevant institutions were rather different in this respect. Her petitions and letters were generally not pragmatic but assertive and increasingly angry as her attempts to secure rightful access to her husband's pension and life insurance were thwarted by those in

⁴⁷ See e.g. BiH, AUPiPŽJ, fond Đuro Zatežalo, 3/bb, unnumbered, Milka Lipovac to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes, Mostar, Bosnia and Hercegovina, 16 April 1945; BiH, AUPiPŽJ, fond Đuro Zatežalo, 3/bb, unnumbered, Anda Karan to the War Crimes Commission in Kraljevo, Serbia, undated but 1945; BiH, AUPiPŽJ, fond Đuro Zatežalo, 3/bb, no. 305, Vasa Hamović to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes, Mostar, Bosnia and Hercegovina, 15 June 1944; BiH, AUPiPŽJ, fond Đuro Zatežalo, no. 265, Stana Tošić to the City Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes, Mostar, Bosnia and Hercegovina, 12 June 1944; BiH, AUPiPŽJ, fond Đuro Zatežalo, unnumbered, Danilo B. Šupljeglav to the Commission for the Determination of War Crimes by the Occupiers and their Helpers in Bosnia and Hercegovina, undated but probably 1945.

positions of power and influence. Most of the correspondence between Slavica and officials which has survived is necessarily from the side of the individuals answering her letters and it is these replies that provide most of our impression of her own letters and the tone she adopted in them. It is likely that at the time Slavica wrote her letters, she was under significant emotional stress which probably intensified with each – to her – stonewalling reply, and there is enough evidence in the letters from officials to get a sense of the trauma the war had had on her. For Slavica, it seems that the pension and life insurance claims she fought for over so many years represented more than the mere issue of recompense, important though that was. Her dogged pension fight also represented a struggle to secure posthumous justice for her husband and recognition of his victimhood. Finally, her gender and the generally assertive tone that she took in her letters also needs to be considered as a reason why many of the exchanges between her and officials were especially sharp. While socialist Yugoslavia was intended as a state which practised gender equality, in contrast to many similar petitions that women wrote at that time which emphasized vulnerability and helplessness, Slavica's letters stepped out of the conventions of the time. Thus, these petitions provide insight not only about processes of restitution for Holocaust survivors but also the role gender and social conventions played in this process.

Slavica's correspondence with her husband's former employer began almost immediately following the end of the war. Even in her early letters to the Croatia Cement Company factory, it is evident that the everyday organisational structure inside companies was being transformed in conformity with the socialist economic model. In a letter to the Podused branch of the Syndicate of Workers, Officials and Employees of the Croatia Cement Company factory, which must have been written between May and July 1945, asking to receive her husband's pension, she made clear the harsh material postwar conditions she and her daughter were enduring and the suffering of her family under war and occupation.⁴⁸ Her letter also makes clear that the factory was aware of the fate of her husband which suggests this was not her first correspondence with company officials.

⁴⁸ In her letter she mentions that she has no furniture in her apartment but by July 1945 she had managed to secure the return of her furniture from Čvrljević, meaning that it must have been sent sometime between early May and July 1945.

As you are already aware, my husband Josip Flesch, a former employee of this company, together with me and our four-and-a-half-year-old child was taken away by the Ustaša on 9 August 1941 to a camp, my husband to Jasenovac where he was killed and in 1942 and my child and I to the camps of Metajna, Slana, Kruščica, and Loborgrad. After ten months my family was successful in extracting me from the camp and I returned with my child weak, shattered, and without a stitch to my name, all my possessions, linen, outfits and apartment taken by some Ustaša. I had to fight for a long time before I got my apartment back, but completely empty – all the valuables which had not already been sold or hidden the Ustaša took into another apartment of [Čvrljević's] and up to today I have got nothing back and what remains consists only of some wrecked furniture. Then in such a difficult situation, I remained destitute with my daughter, not having anything to give to my daughter to eat, let alone for myself, without clothes or any kind of resources. If it had not been for kind people who rushed to help us, my suffering would have been much greater.

After my liberation from the camps, I contacted the management of 'Croatia' regarding pension for the thirty years of service of my husband and received this. But this pension (it amounted from 1 January 1944 to 31 December 1944 to 8000 kunas and from 1 January 1945 to today to 22,000 kunas monthly), with the expensive cost of living, was too small even to allow me to buy the most essential food for my child and myself, never mind to buy outfits, shoes, (we did not have these at all because the Ustaša took everything from our apartment even down to the smallest trifle) and firewood so that my child and I froze and frequently I did not have and nor do I have today anything to cook dinner with. And today, along with such great expense, with a pension of 22,000 kunas monthly, I cannot afford to purchase even the most basic necessities for my child.

Along with the above description of my situation and that of my daughter, I am contacting you with an appeal for you to take up my case so that I receive the monthly provision which all other employees of the company receive. The receipt of this monthly provision in the current time when the prices of flour and bread are unattainable would be for both of us of indescribable help and I ask once again that you don't reject my petition perhaps for the reason that such provisions are not approved for other pensioners because

respectfully they do not find themselves in the same position as me (I am 51 years old and I got so cold in the camps that I suffer from chronic sciatica) along with my child and nor did they endure such misfortune as me during the period of "Ustaša rule" as me.⁴⁹

Slavica's case continued for a number of years without resolution. On 27 May 1947, the Section for Social Insurance in the Ministry of Labour wrote to the operational management of the Croatia Portland Cement Company, a copy of which was sent to Slavica. The correspondence was as notable for the bureaucratically cold language as it was for highlighting the labyrinthine administrative system that victims of the Holocaust were required to navigate to gain not only compensation but the benefits which their murdered spouses and relatives were entitled to from their former employers. In the letter to the company, the chief of the section reported that "Slava Flesch," the widow of Josip Flesch, had written to complain to the Ministry of Labour that for the past ten months the factory had not paid out to her any pension assistance or indeed any money. He pointed out that according to the regulations for the liquidation of pension funds, the Croatia Portland Cement Company was required to pay Slavica pension payments backdated from 1 August 1946 on the condition that she was not already receiving a pension through mandatory pension insurance. The sum was settled at 1100 dinars monthly from 1 September 1946 to 30 April 1947 and from 1 May 1947 onwards at 1200 dinars. The letter ended with the now customary salutation in the new socialist state: "Death to fascism – liberation to the people!"⁵⁰

These pension payments were subsequently confirmed in correspondence to Slavica a few months later by Ivan Domačinović, temporary director of the Croatia Cement Company factory in Podsused, which had by then been renamed Sloboda. The total amount was to be remitted from the liquidation of the assets of the cement factory's former pension fund and Domačinović added that until a further decision had been taken by the State Institute for Social Insurance Commission for the Liquidation of Businesses, she would be sent the enterprise's pension sum of 1200 dinars monthly in advance which

⁴⁹ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, Slavica Flesch to the Podsused branch of the Syndicate of Workers, Officials and Employees of the Croatia cement factory, c May-July 1945.

⁵⁰ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, „Predmet: Flesch, Slava ud. pok. Josipa – reguliranje mirovine“, 11101-V-1947, 27 May 1947.

suggested that the level of pension might be subject to change in the future. In closing, Domačinović asked her to confirm her receipt of the remittance and agreement with the terms laid out in the letter and she was also asked to confirm that she was not receiving a pension from the mandatory state pension insurance system.⁵¹ This correspondence between Slavica and the administrators of the now-nationalised and shortly to be liquidated enterprise added yet another layer of uncertainty and complexity in Slavica's struggle to achieve some measure of material restitution while highlighting the meagre pension Slavica and other widows in her situation received and the challenges they faced as sole breadwinner in providing for themselves and their families in the harsh postwar economic climate.

By late 1947, Slavica was living in Banja Luka where she received further unwelcome news about her late husband's pension fund. On 20 December 1947, the new director of the Sloboda Cement Company factory in Podsused, Franjo Šegvić, wrote to "comrade" Slavica Flesch to inform her that in regard to the payment of her widow's pension, the day before, 19 December 1947, the Zagreb branch of the State Institute for Social Insurance had taken over the pension fund of the former Croatia Portland Cement Company and consequently this fund had "definitively been liquidated." Thus, he added, "beginning on the 1 January 1948 we cannot remit to you the pension payments because we no longer have at our disposal any kind of resources for this purpose." Instead, she was advised to contact the State Institute for Social Insurance which would provide her with "full directions" for the regularisation of her pension. However, he cautioned her that, "for future reference," she would have to supply a death certificate for her deceased husband to continue receiving the pension.⁵²

Although we do not know how Slavica received this news, we do know that the correspondence between her and officials continued for a number of years because as late as 1951 she was still fighting to secure her rights as the chief benefactee of her husband's pension fund and was in direct contact with his former enterprise. Although it isn't clear exactly what Slavica

⁵¹ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, unnumbered, Ivan Domačinović to Slavica Flesch, 9 July 1947.

⁵² BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, Franjo Šegvić to Slavica Flesch, 20 December 1947.

wrote in her correspondence to the director of the Sloboda Cement Company factory, Ivan Grah, from the tone of his reply it seems that she was deeply frustrated with his responses. In his letter of 24 August 1951 to Slavica, Grah rejected her accusations although the tone of his letter underlined the deadening nature of the bureaucracy that confronted her, with little apparent regard for the feelings of bereaved family members struggling to survive materially and emotionally, which must have been a major factor in her frustration. Yet as Grah's letter also suggests, the bleak fate of her husband must have continued to overwhelm her. It is possible that Slavica mentioned her husband's killing in her correspondence with state institutions and his former employer because she thought it would cause officials to view her application more sympathetically. However, it is also likely that discussing the fate of her husband in the course of what was, for the official involved, at least, a mundane administrative issue satisfied an emotional need in Slavica to not only write about but *write down* her family's experiences: not so much so they were permanently recorded but more as a means of working through her own trauma and making sense of what she had endured.

In answer to your letter of 22 August 1951 regarding the question of acknowledging the employment of your deceased husband Josip Fleš [Flesch], we report the following: From your letter, it seems that you are not satisfied with our response to this question even though everything has been done that could be done... Your statement that your husband carried out the duty of a deputy director is inaccurate. In this respect, once again, a review of the old records was carried out but unfortunately nothing was found except a salary list of officials for 1940, among which your husband's name was also found with the income cited in the acknowledgement... of 1 August 1951 that has already been sent to you. As regards your allegations about the arrest of your husband by the Ustaša and similar things, this is correct but is not important for confirming his employment. However, one thing does astonish us and that is where you allege in your letter that your husband was employed in this enterprise from 2 August 1911 to 15 August 1941 and that you can *evidentially prove* this assertion. If this is correct (that you can evidentially prove this) why then do you need confirmation about the employment of your husband from this enterprise if you already have at your disposal the same information?... This enterprise, as has already been made clear to you... only has records

for workers and clerical staff from 1923 onwards. That being so, any further correspondence on this question with this enterprise would be pointless. The tone that you used in your letter is, without question, inappropriate and not recommended.⁵³

Conclusion

The story of Slavica Flesch, her husband Josip, and daughter Renata is a paradigmatic example of the fate of the victims of the Ustaša regime and the Final Solution itself, providing us with insights into how antisemitism, antiserbism and the destructive racial ideology of the NDH tore apart ethnically and religiously mixed families whose very existence was an obstacle to the ethnically homogenous society the Ustaša regime aimed to build. Slavica Flesch and her family experienced the full range of policies the Ustaša regime implemented to remove and destroy “undesired” population groups, from deportation to concentration camps, the confiscation of property and intentional economic impoverishment through forced conversion to Catholicism and then a limited and precarious “reintegration” into mainstream society, though one still structured by the threat of arrest, imprisonment and possible death as the contrasting fates of Slavica and Renata, on one hand, and that of her Jewish relatives on the other underlined. Along the way, Slavica could both count on the help and support of friends and acquaintances as well as the indifference of some of her husband’s closest colleagues, but until the collapse of the NDH and Ustaša regime in May 1945, Slavica and her daughter continued to live in poverty at the margins of society.

Although in some respects, the story of Slavica – a Serbian Orthodox convert to Judaism – is unrepresentative of the experiences of the majority of Serbs and especially Jews in the NDH, few of whom had access to her contacts or former social prominence, her story nevertheless illustrates the contrasting choices available to middle-class Serbs and Jews under the Ustaša regime: as the fate of her husband illustrates, there were few Jews, no matter how prominent or influential, who were able to secure release from the state’s concentration camps or who experienced readmittance into the charmed circle of “Aryan”

⁵³ BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection, Ivan Grah to Slavica Flesch, 24 August 1951, BiH, AUPiPŽJ, private family collection.

citizens. There can have been even fewer of them who challenged the NDH authorities as Slavica did and won, even if it was in some respects a pyrrhic victory. However, as Slavica's life in the postwar Yugoslav state makes clear, liberation did not necessarily bring restitution. To the backdrop of collectivisation, Stalinisation, nationalisation, and antizionism, the fight for justice and recompense by Holocaust survivors and the families of victims came up against a socialist bureaucracy which was unsympathetic to claims for the restitution of property and assets, never mind the emotional needs of those, like Slavica, who had endured four years of Ustaša terror and along the way lost almost everything they valued. The close of the war, then, did not mean the end of Holocaust survivors' ordeal, but simply a new chapter in a longer process.

SUMMARY

This article draws on the correspondence of one mixed middle-class Serbian-Jewish household in Zagreb, the Oklobdžija-Flesch family, consisting of Josip, his wife Slavica, and their daughter Renata, to shed light on how victims of wartime terror in the NDH tried to negotiate their survival in the state and even challenge Ustaša orthodoxies to gain restitution for their losses. At the same time, it explores the often ambiguous and contradictory relationship of the NDH and Ustaša regime to race and nationality. Likewise, Slavica's postwar interactions with officials provide insight on bureaucratic attitudes towards, and treatment of, Holocaust survivors in postwar Yugoslavia and the struggle survivors and the families of victims experienced in their attempts to secure restitution, bringing into focus the complicated attitude of postwar Yugoslavia to the legacy of the Holocaust and Jewish survivors in the late 1940s at the height of collectivization, Stalinisation, and anti-Zionism in economics and society. Finally, through the story of one family, it explores the experiences of mixed Jewish-Gentile marriages in the NDH – relationships whose existence struck at the core of the state's binary racial antisemitic ideology and nation-building programme – and the fate of Gentile spouses after the arrest and deportation of their Jewish partners.

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Резиме

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МНОГИ ЖИВОТИ СЛАВИЦЕ ФЛЕШ: ОПСТАНАК, СЕЋАЊЕ И РЕСТИТУЦИЈА У СЕНЦИ ХОЛОКАУСТА

АПСТРАКТ: Овај рад испитује стратегије опстанка, преговарања и послератне реституције жртава државно спровођеног насиља у Независној Држави Хрватској (НДХ) кроз микроисторијску анализу кореспонденције мешовите српско-јеврејске породице Оклобџија-Флеш из Загреба. Посебан фокус стављен је на искуства Славице Оклобџије, при чему се реконструише начин на који су чланови једног домаћинства средње класе настојали да се снађу у оквиру расног законодавства, административне произвољности и идеолошких противречности усташког режима у покушајима да сачувају животе, имовину и правни статус. Рад указује на амбивалентности присутне у расној политици НДХ, нарочито у случајевима мешовитих бракова, који су доводили у питање бинарни антисемитски поглед режима на свет и његов програм националне изградње. Ослањајући се на ратну и послератну преписку са државним институцијама, рад такође прати покушаје Славице Оклобџије да након 1945. године оствари право на реституцију, пружајући увид у бирократске ставове према преживелима Холокауста и породицама жртава у социјалистичкој Југославији. Стављајући у први план искуство једне породице, рад доприноси ширим расправама о свакодневним облицима опстанка под геноцидним режимима, ограничењима расне идеологије у пракси и спорном месту Холокауста и преживелих Јевреја у послератном југословенском друштву.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: Независна Држава Хрватска (НДХ), усташе, Холокауст, мешовити бракови, реституција, јеврејска имовина, стратегије преживљавања.

Рад је заснован на кореспонденцији породице Оклобџија-Флеш, мешовите српско-јеврејске породице из Загреба, коју су чинили Јосип, његова супруга Славица и њихова ћерка Рената. Њихова преписка све-

дочи о начинима на које су жртве ратног терора у Независној Држави Хрватској настојале да преговарају о сопственом опстанку унутар државног система, па чак и да доводе у питање усташке идеолошке ортодоксије у покушајима да остваре реституцију одузете имовине. Истовремено, рад разматра често амбивалентан и противречан однос НДХ и усташког режима према питањима расе и националности.

Послератна интеракција Славице Оклобџије са државним службеницима пружа увид у бирократске ставове у послератној Југославији, као и третман преживелих из Холокауста. Истовремено, она указује на тешкоће са којима су се преживели и породице жртава суочавали у настојањима да остваре право на реституцију. Тиме се у фокус доводи сложен однос послератне Југославије према наслеђу Холокауста и преживелим Јеврејима крајем четрдесетих година, у периоду интензивне колективизације, стаљинизације и антиционизма у економској и друштвеној сфери.

Најзад, кроз причу једне породице, рад испитује искуства мешовитих јеврејско-нејеврејских бракова у НДХ – односа чије је пуко постојање задирало у саму срж бинарне расне, антисемитске идеологије и програма националне изградње државе – као и судбину нејеврејских супружника након хапшења и депортације њихових јеврејских партнера.