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Rory Yeomans. *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. 456 S. ISBN 978-0-8229-6192-5.

Reviewed by Newman John Paul
Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (June, 2013)

R. Yeomans: Visions of Annihilation

In the first months following their installation in power, the Ustashe, the Croatian fascist organization which nominally ruled over the Axis-affiliated Independent State of Croatia (NDH) form 1941 to 1945, launched the so-called 'revolution of blood', a campaign of mass murder which targeted Jews, Gypsies, Serbs, and political opponents. In turn, this campaign provoked a mass insurrection against the new order (especially in Serb-populated lands) that loosened the Ustashe's already tenuous grip on power. In an attempt to shore up support the Ustashe followed their revolution of blood with a 'revolution of the soul': a concerted programme of cultural politics intended to re-cast society and the individual into a new, Ustasha mold. It is this second phase that it is the subject of Rory Yeomans's impressive and innovative monograph. Yeomans has scoured the many journals and newspapers published during the Ustashe's years in power, constructing from them a self-image of the Ustasha-regime. The book has its flaws, but it is an important and challenging addition both to the literature of the civil war in Yugoslavia and to that of eastern European fascism.

Yeomans makes his case over the course of six long chapters, dealing in turn with the Ustashe's attitudes towards students and higher education (chapter one, 'The Generation of Struggle'), their cult of youth ('Annihilate the Old!'), gender relations and the construction of new Ustasha men and women ('Merciless Warriors and Militant Heroines'), cultural values and taste ('Social Justice and the Campaign for Taste'), literature and language ('Between Annihilation and Regeneration'), and martyrdom and moral re-birth ('An Unceasing Sea of Victims and Blood'). Yeomans delivers a vivid portrayal of the regime's cultural politics and its far-reaching designs on society and the individual. Unsurprisingly, it is a picture riddled with paradoxes and contradictions, simultaneously modern and anti-modern, revolutionary yet steeped in traditionalism, future-oriented but replete with references to a medieval and mystical national history. There is an overwhelming sense of insularity to these discussions and debates about cultural politics: while a civil war wages throughout the NDH and the Ustashe are losing control almost everywhere throughout the country, their journals discuss at length a campaign against swearing (pp. 307-308). No doubt the atmosphere in the higher-echelons of this small and disintegrating regime was very rarified, but it needs to be noted that Ustasha journals and newspapers are virtually Yeomans's sole primary source (even readings of poetry and novels published in the NDH tend to be gleaned from articles and reviews in Ustasha newspapers rather than from the works themselves), and the picture we get from them, whilst telling of the attitudes of Ustasha cultural elites, feels rather detached from reality. It is, however, interesting to note that even within this small corpus of regime-affiliated (and presumably regime-sanctioned) publications squabbling about the best way to pursue cultural politics can be clearly discerned (especially, it seems, among university students). The revolution of the soul was hardly a liberal affair, and yet at the very epicenter of this authoritarian project Yeomans has found dissenting voices. It is also interesting to read about the Ustashe's idolization of Jure Francetić (p. 94), the commander of the 'Black Legion' who died following a plane crash at the end of 1942. In Yeomans's analysis, it is Francetić who has the role of charismatic military figure, typically a part played in fascist movements by the leader himself (Hitler, Mussolini, et al). Did Francetić assume this mantle at the expense of Ante Pavelić, the Zagreb lawyer and politician who avoided military service during the First World War on account of his studies (making him one of the few fascist leaders without any military credentials)?

As Yeoman shows, the 'revolution of the soul' was a grand vision for an Ustasha-future. The project was revolutionary in its conception, but it was girded throughout

by the problems of the interwar period. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was by 1941 an acknowledged political failure (even if its eventual collapse was caused by external rather than internal forces), in order for the Ustashe to be successful, indeed, in order for any of the parties fighting the civil war in Yugoslavia to be successful, they needed to draw a clear line of demarcation between themselves and the pre-1941 period. Many aspects of the Ustashe's cultural revolution were intended as a conscious rejection of the failures of the interwar period: nationalism in place of 'cosmopolitanism'; a jaundiced kind of ultra-Croatism to remedy interwar Yugoslavism; revisionism as a corrective to the injustice of the post-1918 peace settlements; the elimination of Serbs against their pre-1941 domination. In their desperate 'flight forwards', away from the many difficulties of the interwar period, the Ustashe resembled their adversaries in the civil war of 1941-1945, the Partisans. Yeomans never systematically addresses this opposition between the Ustasha 'utopia' and the failures of the interwar period. And yet this disjunct underlies so much of the Ustashe's cultural politics, and so much of the programme of the Partisans, too. And perhaps it also accounts for the respective successes and failures of these two groups in capturing the hearts and minds of the South Slavs during 1941-1945.

It is also a shame that Yeomans does not properly engage with the existing literature on the Ustashe and the NDH. To be sure, and as Yeomans notes, Croatian fascism has suffered neglect in an otherwise well-researched field (that of comparative fascism). There are scant general studies of the Ustashe and the NDH in major European languages, to say nothing of more specialized studies such as this. The book is breaking new ground, but that does not give Yeomans license to ignore the important work of, e.g., Martin Broszat and Ladislaus Hory, or the 2006 special issue of Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions, which looked at 'The NDH State in Comparative Perspective'. Stanley G. Payne, The NDH State in Comparative Perspective, in: Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 7 (2006), 4: Special Issue: The Independent State of Croatia (NDH), 1941-45, pp. 409-415. Closer consideration of such works might have cleared up some of the errors and eccentricities that occasionally mar the text. The historian Milan Šufflay was killed in 1931 (not 1934, p. 333). The findings of Boguljub Kočović and Vladimir Žerjavić on the war dead in Yugoslavia during 1941-1945 are pretty standard, but even if one disputes their research, their works should not be cited as examples of the 'most conservative estimates' of Serbs killed during the Second World War (p. 18). And Yeomans routinely refers to the Ustashe, in reality a ramshackle and marginal group of gangsters and political failures, as a 'movement'. This is far too elevated a term, even at the highest tide of the group's support. A question of interpretation, perhaps, but taxonomies are important if we are to build up an accurate comparative dimension to eastern European fascism, and the Ustashe were not a movement in the sense that the Hungarian Arrow Cross or the Romanian Iron Guard were.

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Citation: Newman John Paul. Review of Yeomans, Rory, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945.* H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. June, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=39479

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