This article focuses on the Jewish resistance against the Axis Powers and their local collaborators, the Croatian Ustaše, in the Independent State of Croatia [Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (NDH)], which also included Bosnia and Herzegovina, during World War II.\(^1\) This entity was created out of the break-up of the Yugoslav kingdom on April 10th, 1941, by the Axis Partners Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, joined by minor partners Hungary and Bulgaria. The Axis installed the Ustaše, Croatian insurgents, headed by Ante Pavelić, to rule this new state.\(^2\) From its inception, the collaborationist NDH regime aimed to create a pure Croatian state in the ethnic quagmire that was the Balkan Peninsula. In return for Croatian territorial gains and “independence” from Serbia, Nazi Germany demanded that Pavelić’s regime implement the Nazi-like ideology enshrined in legislation for the “Protection of the Croatian (Aryan) People.” To deliver on their promise the Ustaše implemented a reign of terror against the Jews. The brutish and horrific treatment of the Jews that followed emanated from some combination of ignorance and unprincipled conduct.

In 1944 Srečko Bujas, a former Yugoslav supreme court judge, who was appointed by the Ustaše as a trustee over the Jewish Sephardic Community in Sarajevo, was asked by a representative of the National Commission to investigate wartime crimes,\(^3\) why the Ustaše had behaved so inhumanly towards the Jews? His reply was succinct and clear:

> In our country, the anti-Jewish decrees and ordinances were undertaken by people without any professional qualifications, people without judgment of right and wrong. These young people, once righteous and idealistic, instead of channeling their capabilities and talents for the benefit of their people and homeland, chose for themselves a selfish objective: self-enrichment and self-gratification in the shortest time possible and without careful consideration of the consequences for the future. They understood that the so-called “Racial

\(^1\) Bosnia-Herzegovina is located in southeastern Europe on the Balkan Peninsula, between Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and the Adriatic coast.


Laws” placed the Jews totally outside the realm of the law, regarding their very existence worthless and their earthly possessions as belonging to the individual Ustaša.4

The greed factor was also demonstrated when the Ustaše embraced the Nazi “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in the NDH and threatened with severe punishments its citizens who helped Jewish friends or neighbors escape, while at the same time the Ustaše leadership shielded selected groups of extremely rich Jews, mostly those they designated as “honorary Aryans”. In short, they were a bunch of thugs “out to feather their own nests” and were totally open to corruption.

Based on this brief introduction into the nature and objectives of the Nazi occupiers and their Ustaše collaborators in the years 1941–1945, my aim is to pose three questions, whose answers will demonstrate that despite the heavy losses Jews incurred during the war, they defied and resisted enemies who outnumbered them in manpower and in hardware.

First, how and why were so many Croatian Jews murdered in a relatively short time? To answer this question, we must consider both the perpetrators and their intended victims:

a. What was the strategy devised by Nazi Germany and their Croatian Ustaše collaborators, and what aims did they hope to achieve through the new Independent Croatian state?

b. How did the Jews interpret their situation, and did they understand the threat Hitler posed to them; to the extent they did understand his intentions, what was their strategy for averting a disastrous outcome?

Second, can one make the argument that Jews in the NDH resisted the enemy when between the invasion in 1941 and mid-1943, the Ustaše, the Gestapo and the SS murdered 30,000 out of 39,500 of Croatia’s pre-war Jewish population?

Third, what evidence do we have that Jews in the NDH exhibited a strong will to resist – and outlive – their enemies?

These questions on the nature of resistance will lead the reader to a deeper and more nuanced grasp of the Holocaust in countries of the former Yugoslavia. The discussion of resistance will provide a thus-far missing link to better understanding of the events that took place there during World War II. Most Holocaust literature has focused primarily on the rightly notorious atrocities perpetrated by the Axis Powers and their local collaborators. Only after the disintegration of the

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4 Croatian National Archives [Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (HDA)], ZKRZ-GUZ, 2235/2-45 box 10, testimony by Judge Srećko Bujas, the appointed trustee over the Sephardic Jewish Community in Sarajevo, 210. It was a National Commission for the Verification of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators, the Ustaše.
second Yugoslav state in the early 1990s and the opening of its archives to the
general public, has the rescue of Jews, both by other Jews and non-Jews, as well
as the subject of Jewish defiance become legitimate subjects for investigation.
Many of these recent studies have aimed to undermine the commonly held notion
that during World War II the Jews went to their death like sheep to slaughter.

In order to discuss the nature of Jewish resistance in Croatia, it is useful to
understand how historians have defined the nature of resistance more broadly.
Recent historians of the Holocaust have criticized earlier definitions – particu-
larly in the wake of World War II – as too narrowly focused on organization and
armed opposition.

In his 1986 study of the Holocaust, Martin Gilbert offered a different perspec-
tive by describing Jews’ will to defy the demonizing, brutalizing force of evil, their
refusal to be reduced to the level of animals, to live through the torment, indeed
to outlive the tormentors, in order to give witness to these events in testimony.
“Thus, simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit.” 5 Israeli historian
Yehuda Bauer used the Hebrew term “Amidah”, which he translated as “standing
up against”, in order to convey the all-inclusive nature of resistance, which can
encompass individuals and groups, armed and unarmed opposition to oppres-
sive authority. 6 In my own work on the NDH, I have chosen to define resistance as:
“Any purposeful action undertaken by individuals or groups of Jews to defy the
Nazi and Ustaše racial laws and their ideology of genocide.” 7

In a related approach, historians and other scholars have attempted to create
methodologies for the study of resistance, for example, trying to identify some
“positive characteristics” which correlated with Jewish survival during the Holo-
cast. Harvey Sarner, for example, has pointed out that Albania was the only
country in Europe that had a greater Jewish population after World War II than
before. In seeking to explain this anomaly, he points to “Bessa”, a moral code long
accepted by Albanians that make them responsible for protecting anyone who
comes to them seeking shelter. 8 Bob Moore pointed out the correlation between
Jewish survival and local traditions in the Netherlands and Belgium, such as
helping those who cannot help themselves. 9 Jonathan Steinberg has stressed the

8 Sarner, Harvey: Rescue in Albania: One Hundred Percent of Jews in Albania Rescued from the
Holocaust. Palm Springs (CA) 1997.
2010.
importance of Italian military tradition, which viewed the harming of innocent non-combatant women and children as dishonorable.\textsuperscript{10}

Since the NDH was an extremely heterogeneous entity comprising an unusual mixture of religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and political and philosophical world views, it is practically impossible to identify even one characteristic common to all its citizens. For this reason, my work has been influenced by two historians who chose not to focus on a single homogenous entity. In their multinational histories of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg\textsuperscript{11} and Lucy Dawidowicz\textsuperscript{12} each independently reached essentially identical conclusions regarding those factors that affected the likelihood that a particular group of Jews would survive:

1. The degree of assimilation and acculturation of Jews in a particular country had no significant bearing on their fate; thus, the relatively well-integrated Jews of Hungary suffered great losses, while nearly all the unassimilated Jews of Bulgaria survived.

2. The so-called “positive characteristics” which existed prior to the war, such as a low rate of antisemitism, did not guarantee a positive outcome during the war. Yugoslavia experienced little pre-war persecution, but incurred a high percentage of losses, while 50 percent of Romanian Jews survived the war, even though Romania prior to World War II had a tradition of violent anti-Jewish prejudice.

3. Jewish survival was most endangered in territories where Germany exercised the most direct control and where there was an absence of indigenous political authorities, which tended to act as buffers between Nazis and the local populations. Such buffering was most visible in Zagreb, the Ustaše capital, where Pavelić granted privileges to certain Jewish citizens, only a few of whom were deported and murdered. By contrast, in Sarajevo, where the Nazis established their political and military headquarters, within six months 75 percent of the prewar Jewish population was annihilated, primarily in Ustaše concentration camps. My own research confirmed the importance of each of the three key factors. Almost everything that Yugoslavia held dear before the war was reversed once Nazi Germany took control.

Yehuda Bauer has given impetus to a new trend in Holocaust research methods. Focusing on the uniqueness of each country, he asked a series of basic questions: how, when, and by whom was the act of resistance performed? What was the

response of the Germans? How did countries under German occupation react to acts of defiance exhibited by Jews? His questions opened new vistas for Holocaust research.13 Bauer’s approach has certainly influenced my work.

On April 10, 1941, the Jewish World Changed Forever

Although pre-war Croatian Jews were accustomed to moderate anti-Jewish sentiments, many Croats, including some clergy, objected to the extreme anti-Semitic rhetoric that became increasingly common as Nazi influence in Croatia grew even before the occupation. For example, Andrija Živković in 1938 used the official Catholic newspaper, Katolički list, to condemn anti-Semitism on the grounds that some values superseded nationalism. To ignore these values would lead to the destruction of the Croats’ sense of justice and the society’s moral values.14 There were also Jewish voices heard that responded strongly to the first public signs of anti-Semitic propaganda, pointing out the ideological similarities between local anti-Semitic editorials and those promoted by Nazi Germany.15

After the war, the Yugoslav Jewish historian Jaša Romano stated: “The fact, however, remains that it was the Third Reich who initiated and organized the genocide in all provinces and in some areas [acted] as the executioner as well.”16

A contemporary American historian, born in Croatia, Jozo Tomasevich, made a similar observation:

With the exception of a few brief anti-Semitic measures instituted after the establishment of Yugoslavia [...] there was no anti-Semitism in Yugoslavia until the 1930s. Then, with the growth of Nazi Germany and Nazi ideology after 1933 and the increasing economic and political influence of Germany on Yugoslavia [...] anti-Semitism crept into the Yugoslav scene. 17

Hitler was aware that if he made Croatia an independent state he would satisfy Croats’ widespread desire to escape what they viewed as Serb domination of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In return, he expected the Croats’ loyalty to his own goals

14 Nova riječ, Zagreb, 21. 4. 1938.
15 Židov 33 (1936).
Courage to Resist

for the region: first, to fight alongside the Axis against the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Partisans; second, to rid Yugoslavia of Jews. To further his plans, Hitler sent German agents to the Croatian capital Zagreb under the supervision of Colonel Edmund Veesenmayer, an expert on installing pro-Nazi governments in central and southeast Europe. As German forces approached Zagreb on April 10th, 1941, Veesenmayer arranged the proclamation of an independent Croatian state to coincide with the troops’ entry into the city. As Tomasevich observed: “Without German tanks and bayonets on Croatian territory, no proclamation of a Croatian puppet state could have succeeded. The new state was the offspring of the Wehrmacht and German subversion experts.”

Thus, it is clear that it was under German guidance that the Croatian Marshal Slavko Kvaternik proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia. Ante Pavelić with 200 to 300 Ustaše paramilitary troops, dressed in borrowed Italian uniforms, entered the city on April 15th, five days after the declaration.

The dismemberment of the Yugoslav state and the distribution of its territories among the Axis partners immediately triggered a civil war that exacerbated the viciousness of anti-Jewish policies. The contest for Yugoslavia involved:

- the *Ustaše*, Croatian fascists, comprising Croats and Muslims;
- the *Četniks*, a remnant of the former Royal Serbian Army;
- the *Volksdeutsche*, approximately 500,000 Yugoslavians of German heritage;
- the *Partisans*, who encompassed diverse ethnic, religious and political affiliations.

Three of these otherwise opposed groups agreed on the need to rid Yugoslavia of Jews; only the Partisans invited Jews to join their ranks and even shielded thousands of them after Italy’s capitulation in September 1943 ended the protection offered to Jews in the Italian occupation zone. By dissolving the Union of the Jewish Religious Communities into 115 individual entities, Yugoslavia’s partition also left Yugoslavia’s Jews without their own strong leadership at a time when it was most needed.

Writing after the war, Charles Steckel, Rabbi of Osijek up to mid-1942, described the predicament in which the leaderless Jews found themselves during the Nazi-Ustaše regime: “Given our circumstances in Croatia, we are people who live from hand to mouth (Hayey Hashaa,) there could not be any long range planning under the condition of having to survive day by day and hour by hour.”

The local Jewish leadership in various communities also believed that the best

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18 Tomasevich, War and Revolution, p. 53.
19 United States National Archives, 4 Micr. No. T-77, Roll 1295, Fr. 814.
way to survive was to stay put, to listen to instructions from the authorities, and to keep a low profile until the danger passed. The comforting words of their leaders sounded more reliable and reassuring than all the stories they had heard from the many immigrants who passed through their city on the way to such places as Turkey, Palestine, and other countries.

Viktor Rosenzweig, a Croatian poet, similarly sensed the lack of direction of those around him and the feelings of social disorientation and alienation caused by the perceived absence of a supporting social or moral framework. In his poem “Not to Run Away” he expressed his personal dilemma:

Should I hold my head up or should I keep it down?
Where should I walk? Where can I go?
To run away, to swallow a poisonous bitter flower;
stare death straight in the eye in this hard moment.
No, no, here to stay, standing firmly on the feet;
Firmly clenching the fist, not to run away.

Rosenzweig’s decision not to run away, but rather to stay, was a form of defiance; unfortunately, by staying, he paid a high price: his life.

**Systematic Annihilation of All Jews**

Since Nazi Germany had developed a plan for the systematic elimination of Jews throughout Europe it expected the Ustaše to comply fully with their ideology and resolve the Jewish Question in the NDH. Ante Pavelić, known as Poglavnik (head), promptly enacted racial legislation patterned on the Nazi model, followed by a reign of terror. The Ustaše police, alongside the SS, the Gestapo and an auxiliary force of Volksdeutsche swiftly implemented and enforced the new decrees aiming to rid the country of all Jews. Soon it became apparent that Pavelić’s regime combined in its cruelty and brutality the worst of Croatian fascism and German Nazism.

Jews were required to register with, and report regularly to, the police. They also had to wear the identifying sign “Z” for Židov [Jews] on the front and back of their outer garments. Jews who had croatized their surnames had to revert to their original names. They were evicted from their apartments and were prohibited

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23 Rosenzweig, Viktor G.: Naš život, [Our Lives]. Zagreb: Cultural Society Miroslav Šalom Freiberger and The Jewish Community Zagreb [Date unmarked].
Courage to Resist

from working in the liberal professions, performing arts, and mass media. On April 30th, the NDH imposed harsh collective measures against its Jews, effectively providing legal justification for their murder. In summary, the process of purging the country of its Jews proceeded in three stages:

First, accomplish their economic destruction by dismissing them from all government and civil service posts and by shutting down their private enterprises, thus denying their ability to earn a living.

Second, demolish their synagogues and cultural institutions, thus destroying their spirit.

Third, to give an appearance of legitimacy to their murderous acts, charge the Jews with collective responsibility for disseminating lies about the conduct of the government, thus disturbing the public peace and order.

Ivo Andrić, the Yugoslav 1961 Nobel Laureate in literature eloquently depicted the predicament of the Jews:

During the Second World War [...] the dark, murderous onslaught of racism managed to disperse and destroy the Jews, unprepared and unaccustomed as they were to this sort of fight. They had always wanted simply to live their lives, yet throughout their tortuous history they had always been deprived of a part of life. This time they were deprived of life itself.

Deportations to NDH concentration camps began in April 1941, and for all intents and purposes ended in mid-1942; from then onwards the Jews were transported to German-run concentration and death camps in Germany, Austria and Poland. Many Jews and non-Jews alike were surprised by the magnitude of Nazi forces and by their fierce determination to destroy the Jews of Yugoslavia by whatever means necessary.

Two Differing Views Regarding Ustaše Efficiency in the Execution of Jews

Raul Hilberg observed that Croatia’s Ustaše had been so “efficient” in implementing anti-Jewish policies that they had accomplished in four months, from April to

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24 National Archives and Records Administration, RG59, 860-H.4016/64, PS/RJH, Persecution of Jews in Croatia, Zagreb, June 13th, 1941.
25 Romano, Jevreji Jugoslavije, p. 61.
27 Romano, Jevreji Jugoslavije, pp. 31–32.
August 1941, what Nazi bureaucrats had taken more than eight years to think up and implement.\textsuperscript{28} Despite the regime’s speed at deporting Jews, documents and testimonies attest that many NDH Jews simply refused to believe the threat Hitler posed to them. But it is not surprising that they found it difficult to conceive of such a possibility. The monumental scope of the Holocaust, as well as its extreme brutality, makes it difficult to comprehend even today, when we have so many “facts”.\textsuperscript{29}

The contrast between Hilberg’s comment on the “efficiency” of genocide in Croatia and the views expressed by Adolf Eichmann on trial in Jerusalem reflect the diversity of their lives. Hilberg, the Holocaust historian, fled Nazi Vienna as a Jew, whereas Eichmann was one of the chief executors of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in Nazi-occupied Europe. Hilberg knew that within approximately three years the Nazis and the Ustaše had been responsible for the annihilation of 75 percent of the prewar Jewish population. Eichmann, however, was professionally annoyed that as of mid-1942, one quarter of the Jews in the NDH were still alive, meaning that the territory was not yet completely “Judenrein”.

Eichmann’s impatience was shared by the Gestapo and the SS, who were directly responsible, from mid-1942, for carrying out the Final Solution in the NDH. To speed up the slow pace of incarcerations in local camps and expedite the process of deportations, Eichmann sent Hauptsturmführer Franz Abromeit to Zagreb to work with Hans Helm, the German police attaché. Although the Ustaše were asked to help cover the expenses of the deportations, at the rate of thirty Marks to the Nazis for each Jew deported, in exchange they received the property of the deportees. This arrangement accorded with a broadly applied “territorial principle” applicable to all European countries occupied by Germany.\textsuperscript{30}

This agreement clearly provided an incentive for Pavelić to deport as many Jews as was possible. Although he proceeded to carry out his end of the bargain, by this point thousands of Jews had stopped believing that they should stay put. The possibility of escape to Italian-occupied territory along the northern Adriatic coast or even to Italy itself presented a particular difficulty since the Italian Army did not share Hitler’s fanatic anti-Semitism. The Nazis were also thwarted by the paragraph in Croatia’s anti-Jewish legislation that awarded the title “honorary Aryan” to some Jews because of their contributions to “the Croat cause”. This unusual exclusion also responded to the reality that a high percentage of

\textsuperscript{28} Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, p. 711.
Courage to Resist

Croatia’s ruling Ustaše clique, including Pavelić himself, were married to Jewish women. About 30 percent of the 1,500 Jewish survivors in Zagreb consisted of these “Aryans”, in addition to some living in mixed (Christian-Jewish) marriages and very wealthy individuals. Thus the Nazis viewed Pavelić as falling short of German standards of racial purity and efficiency when it came to killing Jews.

**Early Historians Pinned Part of the Blame for the Holocaust on Jewish Leadership**

During the first decade and a half following the war, some historians and journalists argued that failures on the part of Jewish leadership throughout most of occupied Europe had contributed to the effectiveness of the effort to rid Europe of Jews. In the NDH, they had:

1. Discouraged Jews from fleeing once the danger was clear;
2. Contrived and carried out an early Ustaše program that offered protection in exchange for “voluntary” contributions of 1,000 kg of gold or its equivalent. (This offer was revoked in mid-1943 with the agreement to deport all NDH Jews.)
3. Provided the enemy with lists of their community’s members.

In attempting to explain the Holocaust, both Hannah Arendt and Raul Hilberg discussed the role of Jewish leadership, in particular that of the eastern European ghetto council (“Judenrat”). Their more nuanced discussions have often been simplified as the charge that “Jews went like sheep to the slaughter.” Often, the implication has been that Jews should have offered armed resistance. In responding to such charges, Charles Steckel, the former rabbi of Osijek, noted that Jewish communities in the NDH, where there were no official ghettos, lacked such an institution as the “Judenrat”.

The boards of Jewish Communities “played the game” cautiously, stalling for time and helping the old, sick and the children, whom they did not want to abandon. The Jewish communities did not become tools in the hands of their oppressors. Neither did they serve the oppressors by providing lists or information.

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31 Arendt, Eichmann, p. 184.
32 HDA, RUR 252, #28572, ŽO 8162, 19.XII, 1941 Židovska Općina Zagreb lista of doktora koji se nalaze u Zagrebu [List of Jewish physicians that still resided in Zagreb]. The list includes 46 names.
33 Steckel, Destruction and Survival, p. 41.
It might seem unlikely that Croatian Jews would have misread Hitler’s intentions, especially after their encounters with thousands of Jewish refugees who passed through Yugoslavia while fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe. But it is quite probable that they realized their own helplessness in the face of Germany’s invasion of their own homeland. Yugoslavian Jews were dispersed throughout the country amongst a large number of local religious communities; without a strong leadership, there would be no clear collective decision as to how to face this challenge. In addition, American Zionist leader Nahum Goldman has suggested that Jewish optimism, which helps to explain the Jews’ survival in the Diaspora for hundreds of years, may have offered Croatia’s Jews a straw to grasp at. However, holding out hope that Hitler would deviate from his original plan of annihilating the Jewish race would prove to be a fatal mistake.34

In great agony, Zdenka Steiner, the only survivor of her immediate family, testified that for many Croatian Jews it had been not hope, but rather complacency in the face of Nazi aggression that had kept them from trying to flee. Although her industrialist father was urged by his American and British business associates to leave everything behind and escape from the NDH with documents they would provide for his family, he refused to leave. As she later recalled:

From today’s perspective, it is clear to me that our fatal mistake was that of not taking Hitler seriously. During all those years he announced his plans to the world, shouting so loudly that heaven and hell could shake, yet we did not hear or did not want to hear. When it did happen it seemed so unexpected, like a whirlwind destroying everything in its way with violent blows.35

Ivo Goldstein, a Croat historian who has written about the Holocaust in his homeland, suggests that “nothing in previous Croatian history” would have led Jews to suspect such life-threatening consequences from World War II. It is true that there were anti-Semitic pamphlets and incidents. Parties with anti-Semitic tendencies in their ideologies and programs existed in Croatia in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, using this rhetoric primarily to gain political power. But anti-Semitism never reached the extreme forms of pogroms and murders that were seen, for example, in Poland and Russia.36

Croatian Jews could not imagine that Nazi Germany and the local Ustaše planned to systematically annihilate all of them.37 Moreover, many Jews told

36 Goldstein, Holokaust u Zagrebu, pp. 78–88.
37 Goldstein, Holokaust u Zagrebu, p. 95.
themselves that once Hitler invaded Russia, the likelihood of his bothering with them was slim. And since a large number of Croatian Jews had converted to Catholicism, they assumed that just by declaring themselves to be Aryans they would be safe, making escape unnecessary. They thus ignored Hitler's definition of a “Jew” as anyone with three Jewish grandparents, regardless of his or her current religious affiliation. But this picture of complacency does not tell the full story.

The Reality of Widespread Jewish Resistance and Defiance

Despite the evidence for Jewish complacency on the part of Croatia’s Jews in the face of Nazi intentions and actions, archival material and the testimonies of survivors and rescuers document widespread resistance. Moreover, more recent historiographic literature on the fate of the Jews in occupied Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – as well as my own interviews with survivors and rescuers – contains thousands of poignant stories which, while collectively describing a tragedy, reveal many acts of courage on the part of individuals and groups that refused to reconcile with the fate their enemies had planned for them.

One category of Jews to early on experience Nazi viciousness comprised Jewish POWs deported to concentration camps in Germany after April 17th, 1941, once the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was invaded, occupied and eventually capitulated. Dr. Josip Presburger described the despair felt by some 400 Jewish officers and soldiers when the Yugoslav Royal Army surrendered without a fight when confronted by the Wehrmacht. Zlatko Najman explained that once they recognized that it was useless to lament their predicament, both Jews and non-Jews formed a Communist Party cell in their camp. Their aim was to boost the morale of the prisoners and try to instill hope and revive a fighting spirit. Within weeks the despair vanished, and they turned their thoughts and actions towards the defeat of Nazi Germany.

In preparation for victory, the POWs in the Jewish barrack No. 37 in Nuremberg camp in Germany established a center for illegal activity, with a radio that was tuned to Allied broadcasts. News of the war was then transmitted to other barracks. In January 1945, as the Allied were close to victory, the Jewish POWs

were preparing an escape to join the Red Army, which was marching towards Yugoslavia.

2,445 Jews Returned to Sarajevo from 1945 to 1952

Individual Jews who returned to their homes in 1945 considered themselves to be survivors who had dared to defy the Nazi and Ustaše regimes when they joined the Partisans, escaped to the Italian zones, or hid in remote villages or in basements and attics. I found information about some of these survivors on thousands of small file cards filled out by survivors returning to Sarajevo in the period May 1945 through 1952. The international humanitarian organizations that provided assistance to the survivors requested accountability from the Jewish communities. In order to receive food and clothing assistance the survivors had to fill information about themselves and their family members, such as: name and surname of the family head, names of parents, wife and children and their dates of birth. The community officials also asked where the returning individual had spent time during the war. Unfortunately, this information was asked only of family heads; since husbands and wives were often separated during the war, this format meant that much valuable information was lost. An important factor in Jewish defiance in these camps is that Jews immediately opened schools for children and created a vibrant social and cultural life.

SARAJEVO SURVIVORS BY AGE GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 and under</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 40</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 and above</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2,455 JEWS OF SARAJEVO SURVIVED

- In hiding all across NDH, 650, 26%
- Germany & Ustashe Con. Camps, 86, 4%
- Germany, POW’s, 127, 5%
- Italy, from 1941, 160, 7%
- Partisans from 1941, 114, 5%
- Italian Con. Camps, 1,318, 53%

The above diagrams, summaries of the chart (below) reveal two important facts regarding the havens where these Jews from Sarajevo had survived. First, more than half had been interned by the Italian Army on the Islands of Korčula and Rab. (A smaller number had been deported to a camp in Italy proper.) Second, the largest group of survivors by age (61%) comprised those ages 16 to 40.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival Locations 1941–1945</th>
<th>Heads of Family</th>
<th>Family members who survived</th>
<th>Total number of survivors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concentration Camps</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalmatia: Korčula, Split Dubrovnik and others</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany POWs</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOB\textsuperscript{40} and NOV\textsuperscript{41}, from 1941</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAB 1943, Partisans 1943–1945.</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (before September 8th, 1943)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarajevo</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various Locations within NDH</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>2,455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jewish Communities Boards**

By and large, Jewish community board members in Zagreb, Sarajevo, Slavonski Brod and Osijek joined forces to provide concentration camp inmates with the best care that was possible under the circumstances. Neither Dr. Hugo Kon, president of the Zagreb Jewish Community, nor Rabbi Miroslav Freiberger, the city’s chief rabbi, had any intention of acting in the interests of the Nazis or the Ustaše authorities; however, they understood that without a modicum of cooperation, such as agreeing to assist in the collection of the “voluntary contribution” of 1,000 kg of gold from their members, their ability to offer limited help to their communities – and perhaps their lives – would be cut short.

Certainly some board members made mistakes, such as the leaders in Sarajevo who advised their members to stay put, or Dr. Kon, who in desperation wrote to NDH Minister of the Interior Andrija Artuković begging him to “remove from

\textsuperscript{40} NOB: Narodnooslobodilacka Borba (People’s Independence War).
\textsuperscript{41} NOV: Narodnooslobodilacka Vojska (People’s Independence Army).
Zagreb all the Jews that had no businesses and no papers to a collective resettlement."\(^{42}\) He wrote this letter on July 2nd, 1942. The following month, one of the largest transports left Zagreb for Auschwitz. Was the timing of this transport simply a coincidence, or was it somehow the consequence of Kon’s letter? If the latter case, this letter, which Kon called a “Request and Suggestion”, would have been an “unfortunate mistake” that resulted in the loss of life of 1,200 Jews?

Survivors and documents attest to the boards’ invaluable role in organizing teamwork among the communities of Sarajevo, Osijek and Slavonski Brod. Working jointly to improve conditions for Jews sent to primitive concentration camps, they erected rows of bunk beds, toilets, and kitchens, repaired windows and improved air circulation. However quickly and inadequately done, these repairs were a considerable improvement over the situation of inmates had there been no help from the Jewish communities.\(^{43}\) The communities also shared responsibility for providing the camps with food, medical care and other essentials, as well as for the coordination of regular visits by the Red Cross. The United Board of the Jewish Communities also ensured regular mail deliveries from and to family members. The regular involvement by the communities in the lives of camp inmates also reduced opportunities for the authorities to plunder for their own benefit resources intended for inmates. Regular mail delivery was one service that particularly helped raise camp morale, as the author Hinko Gottlieb conveys in his imagined letter from a Jewish inmate:

\begin{quote}
Today again I am allowed to write a letter. \\
I am healthy and do not worry about me. \\
Thank you for the package, But as far as the salami is concerned, \\
leave it for yourself, none of us is hungry. \\
I will soon get out. \\
And therefore, dear wife, I need nothing more. \\
Tell mother that she should not write anymore. \\
Is she better with her heart? \\
Our acquaintances here are as it may be \\
Katz was yesterday ... released to freedom. \\
Every day two or three are gone. \\
And so will I ... \\
On Hans, I beg of you, take good care \\
When you reach with him the doctor please let me know, \\
And believe me, this is the only thing that still concerns me.
\end{quote}

\(^{42}\) HDA, RUR 252, Inv. #29876.  
\(^{43}\) Pinto, Avram/Pinto, David: Dokumenti o stradanju jevreja u logorima NDH. Sarajevo 1972, pp. 45–65.
Little boys rarely tolerate the German climate.
From my top coat, if it hangs in the closet
And if otherwise you did not use it,
Attempt to reach Grunewald with him (if you are permitted)
Show him the grass and flowers, water and the forest
And tell him a bit about his father.⁴⁴

In this poem, Hinko Gottlieb aimed to demonstrate how essential news was passed from the concentration camps to the families at home. Most messages carried information about inmates’ wellbeing and also how best the family should proceed in order to survive and where money or valuables were hidden. Instructions to leave everything behind and go to the doctor and get help, meaning to escape to the mountains and forests where the air was clear – clear of Nazis and Ustaše – might be code for advice to join the Partisans or flee to the Italian Zone, as against remaining amidst the German climate of brutality and starvation which was intolerable for children.

The Sarajevo Jewish Community established a strong bond with Jewish volunteers from Slavonski Brod when they took it upon themselves – under the watchful eyes of the Ustaše – to await transports of deportees from Sarajevo going through their area. Because these transports were often delayed, the tea and food they prepared for the deportees often spoiled on hot summer days and had to be thrown out. To avoid the waste of food obtained with great sacrifice, the volunteers began preparing hard and nourishing cookies that could last for months and which the deportees could take with them. This was yet another small victory of defiance in the constant struggle for survival. In reaction to the selfless conduct of the Jewish volunteers from Slavonski Brod, many of the deportees emptied their pockets and handed over their valuables so food and drinks could be obtained for other transports. Thus the Holocaust also provided opportunities for behavior that was compassionate and noble.⁴⁵

Women’s Defiance at Home and in Auschwitz

The objective of the Nazis and their Ustaše collaborators was to kill all Jews – men, women, and children – yet most Jewish victims were women. The Ustaše

⁴⁵ Steckel, Destruction and Survival, pp. 23–25.
sought first to rid the city of men who might potentially take up arms against them. However, Jewish women who saw their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons being deported, insisted that men should be the first to escape. Each Jewish family had to make a painful decision as to which of its men was the most likely to be deported and which men were most likely to survive? Such criteria determined who would get exit visas and travel papers. Once the men had escaped Ustaše and Nazi-occupied cities, women began to focus on their own survival and that of their younger children and the elderly left to their care. These women demonstrated courage, ingenuity and defiance.

Edit Armuth, a survivor initially of the Rab concentration camp in the Italian zone on the Adriatic and then Auschwitz, where she was deported, credits other women inmates for her survival in Auschwitz. Although she was gravely ill, word went out that at the Rab camp Edit had been active in the AFŽ (Association of Anti-Fascist Women). She acknowledged that without their boundless support and protection she and many other women would have not left Auschwitz alive.46

The Jewish women of Osijek overlooked the religious divide among Yugoslavia’s Jews between the Sephardim, whose origin was in Spain, and the Ashkenazim from Central and Eastern Europe. What had been an age-old source of animosity and divisiveness was set aside in an effort to save Sarajevo’s children from annihilation. Osijek’s Jews recognized that the help they provided to the women and children from Sarajevo became a sacred mission for Jewish women as well as men.47

The prelude to this effort to save Sarajevo’s children was the unique situation that existed in Đakovo concentration camp for women and children, which was located near Osijek. Unlike other Ustaše camps in the NDH, the Đakovo camp initially was run by the local district police headquarters, which allowed individual prisoners to leave the camp in order to purchase necessary goods in the town, to visit the hospital in Osijek for check-ups and to call on relatives and friends.48 It was decided by the police and the Jewish Board of Osijek that all Jewish children under the age of ten from Sarajevo would be placed in homes of Jewish families in Osijek and its vicinity. In addition, in certain cases girls and boys, including 16-year-olds, obtained their release from the camp.49

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49 Steckel, Destruction and Survival, pp. 59–91. (Letters from commissioners Srečko Bujas and Branko Milaković, Sarajevo, November, 16th, 22nd, 23rd, 1941).
Unfortunately, only 40 to 50 of the Sarajevo children remained in Osijek after the August 1942 deportation. This first major transport, involving 1,200 Jews, occurred during the night. Among those seized in the nighttime raid by the Ustaše and Volksdeutsche forces were about 350 Jewish children. No traces were left of this transport; more than a thousand people simply vanished. Fearing subsequent deportations, the few remaining Jews in Osijek felt that they could no longer assume responsibility for the children. Fortunately, the Jewish Community in Split, to whom they appealed for help, responded favorably, and sent individuals to transfer the children across enemy lines. The majority of the Osijek children arrived safely in Split, which was still under Italian occupation.

After Italy’s capitulation on September 8th, 1943, the situation for Croatian Jews again became precarious in anticipation of Split’s imminent occupation by Nazi Germany and the Ustaše. With financial and logistical help from DELASEM (Delegazione Assistenza Emigranti e Produghi Ebrei), an Italian organization for Jewish refugee aid, the remaining Sarajevo children were transferred to Italy, where they joined other Jewish orphans from Austria and Germany who were residing in a house known as Villa Emma in Nonantola, a region of Modena. In 1943, as German units were nearing Nonantola, the children together with their teachers and school leader fled to Switzerland. The visa fees required by the Swiss authorities and expenses for their journey were financed by Richard Lichth, the Zionist delegate to the League of Nations in Geneva. On October 6th, 1943, thirty-three children and seven adults boarded the train to Modena, on their way to Swiss territory. Eliezer Kaveson, whom I met in Israel, recalled that it was Yom Kippur of 1943, the Jewish Day of Atonement, when they left Italy. For the last leg of the journey, the children went on foot over a dangerous mountainous passage, forming a human chain, with the younger children between older ones and the adults. After several hours of hiking through rugged terrain, they reached their destination in Bex-les-Bains.50

When Italy capitulated, another group of Jews was freed from the Italian concentration camp on the Island of Rab. Officially known as “Campo di concentramento per internati civili di Guerra–Arbe”, it held approximately 3,366 Jews and 28,000 Slovene inmates.51 Although the Italian Army laid down its arms, the inmates rightfully assumed that within hours the German Army would take over

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most of the former Italian territories in Croatia. The impending situation would be disastrous for all, especially the Jews; they had to find a way to resist. One group of about 211 elderly and sick Jews chose to remain on Rab, while a similar number of wealthy individuals decided to hire boats and leave for Italy proper. The remaining Jews selected several delegates who contacted the Croatian partisans. Young men and women joined the Partisans in various capacities, while women with young children and the elderly became part of millions of other Yugoslav refugees, known as “Zbijeg”. Thousands, from all ethnic and religious groups, were marching towards the Croatian free territories.

The National Antifascist Board People's Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH) – in recognition that people needed to be occupied and that work was the best medicine – engaged many of the Jewish women and elderly in projects aimed at rebuilding Yugoslavia. Despite the unimaginable hardships and fears of facing a new existence, the women welcomed the challenge. The hard physical and mental labor of erecting schools, soup kitchens, and rebuilding the country’s infrastructure signified for them that life must go on. In my interviews with two of these women, Ela Finci, and Erna Kaveson, and several others I interviewed described their good fortune at ending up with the Partisans, the opportunities they seized when they returned to school and their earnest efforts to make up for the lost years while the war continued.

Jews, along with many others, resisted the forces of darkness with determination. The death of many does not, in itself, prove the absence of resistance. Nonetheless, those individuals who acted swiftly and seized an opportune moment to escape, especially soon after the NDH was declared, in most cases survived.

### Summary and Conclusions

This article argues that we cannot really comprehend the Holocaust without considering the fact that some Jews did resist and escape the Final Solution, even after the outbreak of war made such efforts incomparably more difficult. Moreover, by

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54 Ela Finci, interview, August 11th, 2003, Sarajevo.
55 Erna Kaveson, interview, August 13th, 2003, Sarajevo.
examining the dynamics of rescue in a complex geographic area that has been less examined by historians, we can perhaps more clearly identify some of the factors that either encouraged resistance or made it virtually impossible.

In relating several stories of defiance, resistance and the will to survive during the greatest tragedy that the Jewish people have experienced, three important variables proved to be keys to their survival:

First, the Nazis did not exercise a uniform degree of control throughout the NDH; the rate and intensity of Nazi control determined the fate of the Jews;

Second, characteristic of the Jews’ will to live and fight for life even under terrible conditions was demonstrated when they established schools and cultural activities wherever they were with other Jews, thereby demonstrating their defiance and their will to live as human beings even in German and Italian concentration camps;

Third, the Jews felt an intense need to tell the world about both the atrocities committed by their enemies, and also the heroic acts they had witnessed.

Finally, for all its tragedies and horrors, which demonstrated the worst of which human beings are capable of doing to each other, the Holocaust also provided opportunities for some to demonstrate behavior that was compassionate and noble. This is probably one of the reasons that survivors had refused to accept the notion that Jews had gone quietly to their slaughter. They knew that they had done their utmost to resist the enemy in order to survive, while helping others to do the same.