



SERBIA AND THE SERBS IN WORLD WAR TWO

EDITED BY SABRINA P. RAMET
AND OLA LISTHAUG



Serbia and the Serbs in World War Two

Also by Sabrina P. Ramet and Ola Listhaug:

Co-Edited with Dragana Dulić: CIVIC AND UNCIVIC VALUES: SERBIA IN THE
POST-MILOŠEVIĆ ERA

Serbia and the Serbs in World War Two

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*For Tom Emmert
and
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Glossary

Axis collaboration: Working together with Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy for the purposes of winning the war against the Allies and of building a New Order. By convention, the term *Axis collaborator* is taken to mean a partner enjoying only limited autonomy from Nazi Germany (or Fascist Italy).

Collaboration: Working together on a common project; cooperation.

Fascism: An authoritarian political ideology or political formation which rejects notions of the rule of law and human equality and repudiates moral universalism in favour of a moral relativism founded on populist ultra-nationalism, and which is characterized by a palingenetic myth, the cult of the leader, the glorification of violence, and a political programme driven by the goal of social reprimation (i.e. the return to primal purity).

Naziism: A form of fascism characterized by racialism, extreme xenophobia, and a determination to carry out an extreme eugenics programme by means of euthanasia and mass murder.

New Order: The political order which Nazi Germany and its allies sought to construct, in which anti-Semitism, anti-urbanism, homophobia, and notions of racial purity were to be combined with neo-traditionalism and the complete subjection of individual needs to the interests and demands of the ruling party.

List of Abbreviations

AJ	Archives of Yugoslavia: <i>Arhiv Jugoslavije</i>
ASCG	Archives of Serbia and Montenegro: <i>Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore</i>
ASNOS	Anti-Fascist Parliament for the People's Liberation of Serbia
AVNOJ	Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia
CPY	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
HL	Military Archive Budapest: <i>Hadtörténelmi Levéltár</i>
INIS	Institute for the New History of Serbia: <i>Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije</i>
KPJ	Communist Party of Yugoslavia: <i>Komunistička partija Jugoslavije</i>
MOL	Hungarian State Archives: <i>Magyar Országos levéltár</i>
NDH	Independent State of Croatia: <i>Nezavisna Država Hrvatska</i>
NOB	People's Liberation Struggle: <i>Narodnooslobodilačka borba</i>
NOP	People's Liberation Movement: <i>Narodnooslobodilački pokret</i>
NOR	National Liberation War: <i>Narodnooslobodilački rat</i>
OZNA	Department for the Protection of the People: <i>Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda</i>
RSHA	German Security Services: <i>Reichssicherheitshauptamt</i>
SANU	Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art: <i>Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti</i>
SDK	Serbian Volunteer Corps: <i>Srpski dobrovoljački korpus</i>
SDPO	Serbian Democratic Renewal Movement: <i>Srpski demokratski pokret obnove</i>
SDS	Serbian State Guard: <i>Srpska državna straža</i>
SGS	Serbian Border Guard: <i>Srpska granična straža</i>

SPO	Serbian Renewal Movement: <i>Srpski pokret obnove</i>
SS	Nazi elite corps: <i>Schutzstaffel</i>
SUBNOR	Association of Veterans of the National Liberation War in Yugoslavia: <i>Savez udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata Jugoslavije</i>

1

Introduction

Sabrina P. Ramet

I

War has a way of etching itself into the long-term memory of a nation, leaving permanent scars that serve to remind members of the nation of their past wounds, their past defeats, their past victories, and sometimes of missed opportunities. World War Two, as the bloodiest war in European history, has left scars in every nation it touched – some deeper, some more painful, but everywhere scars, which affect not only those who lived through it, but also their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren. One of the reasons why these scars won't go away is that, six-and-a-half decades after the end of the war, there continue to be debates in many European countries concerning the war. Leaving aside John Charmley's pointed criticism of Winston Churchill and praise for Neville Chamberlain¹ – which go against conventional wisdom about the comparative merits of these two British prime ministers – the debates have been the most lively in those states in which Axis-collaborationist regimes functioned during the war years. Whether one thinks of Norway² or France³ or Croatia⁴ or Hungary⁵ or Romania,⁶ one can find debates about the role played by the local 'quisling', the incarceration and extermination of Jews (and, in the Croatian case, also of Serbs), the role played by the Churches (especially the leading religious institution in each country), and the question as to whether the Axis satellite may be considered to have been an authentic national state or not and, if not, whether it should be understood as a betrayal of the national tradition.

These same debates continue in Serbia⁷ today, but with an intensity which surpasses what one can find elsewhere in Europe. In Serbia, a law was passed in 2004 declaring that the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović,

2 Introduction

who had collaborated with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during World War Two, were nonetheless 'anti-fascists', and granting state pensions to surviving Chetnik veterans. Again in Serbia, there has been talk of rehabilitating Milan Nedić, who headed the Axis-collaborationist regime in Serbia during World War Two, culminating in a formal petition filed with the District Court in Belgrade in 2008.⁸ Again, in Serbia, one finds history textbooks in use in the schools which present Nedić and Mihailović in a favourable light. And further, Serbia, as Dubravka Stojanović recounts in her contribution to this volume, was the only European country not to send a representative to the commemoration in 2005 of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and sent only a low-level delegation to the main commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of VE Day in Moscow that same year.

This nationalist-inspired historical revisionism has both divided and confused Serbs, as shown, for example, in the fact that, in a survey conducted in early 2009, 34.44 per cent of respondents were in favour of annulling the 1946 verdict against Draža Mihailović (in which he was found to have been a traitor and Axis collaborator), 15.92 per cent were opposed, and 49.64 per cent said that they did not know what to think.⁹

But such revisionism is not innocent; it is an example of what Jean-Paul Sartre called *bad faith*. As Sartre wrote in his 1943 classic, *Being and Nothingness*:

Bad faith does not hold the norms and criteria of truth as they are accepted by the critical thought of good faith. What it decides first, in fact, is the nature of truth. With bad faith a truth appears, a method of thinking, a type of being which is like that of objects; the ontological characteristic of the world of bad faith with which the subject suddenly surrounds himself is this: that here being is what it is not, and is not what it is. Consequently, a peculiar type of evidence appears – non-persuasive evidence. Bad faith apprehends evidence but it is resigned in advance to not being fulfilled by this evidence, to not being persuaded and transformed into good faith ... Thus bad faith ... stands forth in the form [of a] resolution *not to demand too much*, to count itself satisfied when it is barely persuaded, to force itself in decisions to adhere to uncertain truths.¹⁰

In the case of Serbia, bad faith about World War Two means praising Nedić for having allegedly saved Serbian lives by collaborating with the Germans, while, at the same time, praising Mihailović for having