Rory Yeomans


Rory Yeomans is a senior international research analyst at the International Directorate of the UK Ministry of Justice. He is the author of several articles on the Ustasha regime and editor of several books dealing with questions of racism, utopia, and fascism.

Using innovative approaches, Yeomans’s impressive work deals with the Ustasha regime, the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945). Through examination of cultural ideas and their application during the so-called ‘revolution of the soul’, Yeomans deals with questions which have been almost completely neglected among scholars dealing with this topic. His book is divided into six long chapters, plus Introduction and Conclusion, through which different aspects of the regime’s attempt to re-define, re-mould, and re-invent the Croatian nation and its culture are investigated.

In his first chapter, *The Generation of Struggle: Ustasha Students and the Construction of a New Elite*, Yeomans examines the attitudes, practices, organization, ideas, and roles assigned to students before and after the establishment of the Ustasha regime. He examines how students, who were often emphasized as the core of the movement and the new vanguard generation, soon started to ask for a more prominent role within the regime and thus aspired ‘to gain more than shallow adulation in the press’ (p. 73).

His second chapter, *Annihilate the Old! The Cult of Youth and the Problem of National Regeneration*, deals with the question of youth organization. It examines the educational and social policies that were introduced by the Ustahas in order to mould the new Croatian youth. Yeomans is right when he states that the Ustasha movement saw itself as the movement of youth, and therefore it comes as no surprise that youth occupied a large amount of their attention during the regime period. Yeomans examines the relations and tensions which occurred with time between how the youth envisioned state, society, as well as their role, and that of an older generation of Ustasha. Yeomans concludes that this conflict meant that the ‘Ustasha youth saw themselves as the conscience of the movement . . . not to be ignored . . . their loyalty was not to be taken for granted’ (p. 93).

The third chapter, *Mercilles Warriors and Militant Heroines: Making a New Ustasha Man and Woman*, deals with the question of gender and the idea of creating and educating new Croatian men and women. It examines how gender roles were envisioned and influenced by the regime’s patriarchal view of family and society, but it also examines the opposition to such ideas, especially
from younger female activists who ‘sought a more meaningful role’ from that of simply being a mother and a good wife (p. 157).

Yeoman’s fourth chapter, Social Justice and the Campaign for Taste: Cultural Value after the Revolution of Blood, examines notions of ‘refashioning the masses and society in the image of the Ustasha movement’ (p. 179–180). It analyses various discourses before and during the regime period, dealing with moral and social questions such as that of urban and countryside values, the role of sport as means of education, poetry and writing, and the role of cinema and radio.

The fifth chapter, Between Annihilation and Regeneration: Literature, Language, and National Revolution, focuses on the Ustasha’s vision of language ‘as a key marker of national identity’, and the need for purification of a nation, since in the Ustasha mind-set, the Croatian nation needed to be ‘morally and nationally decontaminated’ (p. 260–286).

In his last chapter, An Unceasing Sea of Blood and Victims: The Cultural Politics of Martyrdom and Moral Rebirth, Yeomans examines the application of ideas of regeneration, martyrdom, and the re-birth of the Croatian nation. He examines the regime’s visions and role of regenerative violence, various aspects of youthful militancy, and the question of the moral regeneration of the Croatian nation.

Despite several chronological and factual mistakes, especially with regards to the 1930s, Rory Yeomans’s book presents the reader with a fresh view on how the Ustasha envisioned and imagined the Croatian nation, its culture, its future, and society in general. Yeomans’ book moves further from traditional explanations of the Ustasha movement and their regime, and examines them from a methodologically innovative perspective. In his work Yeomans applies culturalist approaches, at the same time situating his research in a broader, comparative perspective of fascism. In the end, it shows that when considered, examined, and contextualized within the broader perspective of European fascism it becomes clear that Ustasha movement and their regime were not just a disorganised rabble of political gangsters.

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