Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in World War II

This is an in-depth study of the ethnic German minority in the Serbian Banat (Southeast Europe) and its experiences under German occupation in World War II. Mirna Zakić argues that the Banat Germans exercised great agency within the constraints imposed on them by Nazi ideology, with its expectations that ethnic Germans would collaborate with the invading Nazis. The book examines incentives the Nazis offered to collaboration and social dynamics within the Banat German community – between their Nazified leadership and the rank and file – as well as the various and ever more damning forms collaboration took. The Banat Germans provided administrative and economic aid to the Nazi war effort and took part in Nazi military operations in Yugoslav lands, the Holocaust, and Aryanization. They ruled the Banat on the Nazis' behalf between 1941 and 1944, yet their wartime choices led ultimately to their disenfranchisement and persecution following the Nazis' defeat.

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For my parents

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Note on Terminology

The choice of terminology in this book poses a complex set of challenges: there was the issue of avoiding the uncritical use of Nazi terms, which appeared to reify what were Nazi perceptions rather than lived reality; the multiplicity of untranslatable German terms; multiple place names in several languages for a single village, town, or river. Even the use of terms such as "ethnic German" and "Nazi" requires judgments about what made someone a German – or a Nazi.

The adjective "ethnic" preceding a group denominator indicates members of an ethnic group, who were not citizens of that ethnic group's nation-state, i.e., an ethnic minority. In the context of this book, ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) were persons of German origin and language, most of whom were not German citizens for all or part of the Nazi period. By contrast, Reich Germans or Germans from the Reich (Reichsdeutsche) were German citizens as well as persons of German ethnicity.

I use the term "German-speakers" rather than "ethnic Germans" in Chapter 1 to distinguish the Banat's German-speaking settlers from later, nationally tinged definitions of belonging.

"Rom/Roma/Romany" is the preferred term rather than the derogatory "Gypsy," which appears only in direct translations from original documents.

Since this is a German-centric story about an ethnic German community in a multiethnic region, I call most towns and villages in the Serbian Banat by their German names. Many had an official Serbian name as well as a commonly used German name (some also had a Hungarian, Romanian, or Slovak name, depending on the ethnic composition of individual towns and villages). The different names were often used interchangeably, even in official documents, both by the prewar Yugoslav and by the wartime German authorities. Only in 1943 were several dozen place names officially altered so the German names became names of primary usage. In order to avoid confusion and convey the ethnic Germans' perspective, I chose to call places in the Banat by their German names even in chapters dealing with the periods

before 1941 and after 1944. A table of German place names with corresponding Serbian names is included.

With regard to major geographic features such as cities and rivers located outside the Serbian Banat, the ones familiar to English-language readers are called by the Anglicized forms of their names (e.g., Belgrade, Danube, Budapest). Others I call by the names they bear in the language of the nation-state to which they belonged before or during World War II (e.g., Timişoara rather than Temesvár or Temeschburg). I call geographic regions by the name used in the official language of the nation-state to which they belonged (e.g., the Vojvodina and its constituent parts: the Banat, the Bačka, the Baranja, and the Srem). If a geographic term could refer to more than one state, I refer to it by the name it bears in the official language of the state to which it is relevant in this book (e.g., the River Tisa could be claimed by wartime Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia – I call it by its Serbian [Serbo-Croatian] name).

With reference to political movements, I call Josip Broz Tito's communist resistance movement by its widely used Anglicized name "Partisans" (Serb. partizani). I preferred to compromise between original spelling and English plural forms for the name of the Croatian fascists (Ustašas) and the Serbian nationalist-royalist resistance (Četniks).

Since Serbian is a phonetic language, which "transcribes" foreign names in accordance with its own spelling conventions, I decided not to "correct" the names of ethnic Germans as transcribed in relevant primary documents, especially since some of these ethnic Germans preferred to use at least the Serbianized version of their first names in order to blend in, in the postwar period (e.g., Marija instead of Maria).

The term "Serbia proper" refers to the territory that belonged to the Serbian state before 1918 – Serbia south of the River Danube. The "Banat" or the "Serbian Banat" refers to the half of the historical Banat region west of the Serbo-Romanian border. "Serbia-Banat" is a term used in wartime German documents to indicate the territory occupied by Nazi Germany, inclusive of both Serbia proper and the Serbian Banat.

Finally, the choice between calling the larger region "Southeast Europe" or "the Balkans" has been ideologically and politically charged, especially since the 1990s. I consider both terms equally valid and acceptable, since one is geographic and the other a historical name. These terms are therefore used interchangeably to describe the lands of former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece during World War II. Hungary was at that time a liminal state, which could be counted as part of Central or Southeast Europe, depending on the context – the Nazis tended to consider it Southeast-European, as they did wartime independent Slovakia.