

**Pavlaković, Vjeran, and Davor Pauković,  
eds. 2019. *Framing the Nation and Collective  
Identities: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory  
of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia.*  
Routledge, 246 pp, £92.00 (Hardcover)**

In *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities*, eleven authors discuss how commemorations and political speeches related to the Second World War and the Homeland War contribute to constructing national identity in contemporary Croatia. As only one of the ways in which historical narratives and collective identities are (re) produced, commemorative practices are of interest because they provide memory actors with visibility for their interpretations of the past and opportunities to implicitly legitimate their policy agendas.

To introduce the research topic, the editors explain how contesting interpretations of events from the Second World War and the Homeland War create differences in Croatian political elites. The legitimacy of the socialist regime founded in anti-fascist Partisan struggle is challenged by the state-forming narrative underlying Croatian nationalism. This identitarian imperative – to have a state – opens space for apologetic accounts of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna država Hrvatska*), the fascist puppet-state, and of the Ustaša crimes. The debate goes on about whether Partisans or Ustaše contributed more to the national interest of statehood. On the other hand, a consensus as per the Homeland War events prevails among political actors in Croatia, though the unresolved issues from the conflict saturate relations with neighbours. Following the introduction, the volume is divided into four parts.

In the first part, the authors provide an overview of the Croatian contemporary memory culture, from sociocultural, philosophical and linguistic points of view. In chapter one, Pero Maldini analyses it in light of the evolution of collective memory in the “old democracies”, with the focus shifting from heroes to respect for all victims. This evolution is mired by relativization of fascist crimes resulting from simultaneous confronting of two totalitarianisms (communism and fascism) in all post-communist societies. In Croatia, memory politics is additionally burdened by the Homeland War and by conditions such as the absence of civil tradition, lack of nation-state in the past and the democratic deficit of transitional elites. The key social cleavage in Croatia is not socio-economic, but socio-cultural, positioning traditional nationalists against cosmopolitan liberals. Political elites

build on this cleavage, exploiting commemorative practices as tools for mobilisation. In chapter 2, Renato Stanković stresses the dependence of collective memory on cultural context and contestation of memory actors, and discerns between “agents” and “silent majority” within the same mnemonic group. For understanding the social dissemination of remembrance, he turns to social epistemology and the concept of belief as to the foundation of memories. To maintain social order, he argues for exercising state authority in political moderation of cultural memory, even though core beliefs of the structures in power are deemed to influence it. He identifies “new” narratives driving revisionism of official memory in Croatia, such as the one of post-war retaliation of Partisans against Ustaše supporters. In chapter 3, Benedikt Perak analyses 101 speeches given at commemorative events from 2014 to 2016.<sup>1</sup> By using the graph theory algorithms, he classifies 64 speakers and 18 institutions according to 3,370 invoked noun concepts. Perak demonstrates how speakers frame speeches using the cultural models imminent to institutions they are affiliated to. The analysis reveals distinct communities of speakers and framing strategies related to the construction of collective, national identity and shows the dominance of the Catholic institutions in conceptualising national commemorative practices.

In the second part of the book, the authors describe the rivalry of the communities of remembrance regarding the crimes committed in the Second World War. In chapter 4, Davor Pauković discusses the politicisation of the War and the communist legacy at commemorative events, as outlets that allow radical messaging. At commemorations of Partisan crimes (Bleiburg and Jazovka) and in their media representations, he identified frames for interpretation of the past, such as Croatian victimhood and tragedy, condemnation of communist regime, historical revision and connection to the Homeland War. As an important argument of the moderate anti-communist discourse, he pinpoints emphasis on equal respect for all victims, grounded in the shared European memory of totalitarian regimes.<sup>2</sup> The author notes that delegitimization of communist legacy and delegitimization of the Yugoslav idea have been part of nation-building since the 1990s. He concludes that divisions originating from the Second World War today serve both to construct national identity and to discredit political opponents. Vjeran Pavlaković's chapter 5 analyses the commemoration of Jasenovac to demonstrate disruptions of the Second World War anti-fascist narrative by revisionist mnemonic warriors taking place since Croatia's entry in the EU.<sup>3</sup> Until 2013, when the Jasenovac commemoration was part of the strategy of Europeanisation of Croatian memory, President Josipović, as a mnemonic

---

1 The speeches were collected within a project “Framing the Nation and Collective Identities: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia” – FRAMNAT, funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ – *Hrvatska zaklada za znanost*). The project observed seven commemorative events – five from the Second World War (Bleiburg, Brezovica, Jasenovac, Jazovka and Srb) and two from the Homeland War (Knin and Vukovar). The events were selected because of the political debates they stirred, and because of the high political and social profiles of their participants.

2 Memory politics developed in the EU following the 2004–2007 enlargement cycle.

3 According to Kubik and Bernhard (2014), types of memory actors and their corresponding strategies include warriors, pluralists, abnegators and prospectives.

pluralist, tended to use the commemorative event as a tool of reconciliation. However, in the period following Croatia's accession to the EU, the official commemoration has been turning to "official silencing", as President Grabar-Kitarović rejected the regional approach in foreign policy and embraced the European remembrance narrative of two equal totalitarisms. This led to the neglect of Ustaša victims and focus on Partisan victims, at the Bleiburg commemoration, by which the commemorative practice of Jasenovac established by her predecessors was disrupted and stripped from its content. Pavlaković warns that the ongoing politicisation of Jasenovac harms the ability of the region to "move beyond the traumatic past".

The third part presents the Homeland War interpretations by various mnemonic actors. In chapter 6, Ivor Sokolić analyses how the official Homeland War narrative communicates with the narrative of veterans (*branitelji*), whose associations enjoy support from the Catholic Church and receive the most financial and political support and media attention of all the civil society. The veterans' wish to keep the memory of war alive and their role in the society central has rendered a narrative that the war is not yet over. At the same time, both left- and right-wing politicians tend to resort to militaristic language in discussion of peace-time topics and to present the recent war as current reality. The shared and mutually-reinforced narrative of the on-going war implies the notion of the enemy and the construction of "other", a convenient shelter from political accountability. In chapter 7, Dario Brentin deals with the role of sports in honouring the Homeland War. Aside from athletes and sports officials, the organised football fans (i.e. "Torcida" or "Bad Blue Boys") act as memory agents by perpetuating conservative and nationalistic memory tropes in murals and at commemorations. The fan groups see themselves as "vanguards of the dignity of the Homeland War", and their power as memory actors stems from the importance of sport in the national imagination. The author illustrates the power through the "Maksimir Myth", which was constructed by the fans and media, to portray riots at the 1990's match between the Croatian Dinamo and the Serbian Red Star as the symbolic initiator of Yugoslavia's breakup. In chapter 8, Ana Ljubojević deals with the effects of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on the construction of representations of the Homeland War. She analyses the commemorations in Vukovar and Knin held before, during and after two cases tried before the ICTY – *Vukovar Hospital*, where perpetrators were Serbs and *Gotovina et al.*, where they were Croats, by which the founding national narrative of the purity of the war was challenged. The analysis shows that neither of the cases changed the dominant narrative of Croatian victimhood. Failure of the prosecutors to prove joint criminal enterprise in the *Gotovina et al.* case only strengthened the representation of the Homeland War as just, even though the leadership had to admit that some crimes had been committed. In chapter 9, Tamara Banjeglav warns about political exploitation of the Vukovar memory culture, showing that the town's cultivated identification with the war, the double identity of victim and hero, and being a "place of special reverence" has negative effects on its heterogeneous population. She provides a detailed account of the annual commemorations and demonstrates how they have been reproducing the town's war narrative and contributing to social segmentation and strengthening the boundaries between groups.

The fourth part concludes the volume by scrutinising the transnational dimension of Croatian memory. Nikolina Židek's chapter 10 discusses commemorative practices of Croatian diaspora in Argentina, the main destination of the political emigration after the anti-fascist victory in the Second World War. Since 1947, they commemorated the foundation of the Independent State of Croatia (on April 10, 1941) and the Bleiburg killings (on May 15, 1945), and since 1991 they added to these the new Croatian days of remembrance. She explains the logic behind this, positing that the trauma of defeat of the first generation led them to construct an identity of "the real Croats," who "know how Croatia should be led" and that such construction was passed on to their children and grandchildren. Having adopted this identity, the latest generation, well-grounded in the Argentinian society, constructed the representation of the Homeland War as the success of the fight of their ancestors, the liberation of Croatia. In order to maintain the coherence of their identity, they adopted the new commemorative practices, while keeping the old ones. In the final, 11th chapter of the volume, Ana Milošević sheds light on the European dimension of the Croatian memory politics. She explains how Croatia "uploaded" its Vukovar experience onto *European Memory Framework*, looking to both affirm its membership in the EU and obtain an endorsement of its narrative of the post-Yugoslav wars, central to the national identity.<sup>4</sup> Pointing to the contrast between the framing of the European commemorative event (which portrays Vukovar as a symbol of reconciliation), and the national one (which promotes one-sided narrative and excludes the victims from the other ethnicities), she warns about the implications of the uploading of memories by the new member states from the former Yugoslavia. The difference of their narratives of the War may in the future lead to the challenging of the Croatian narrative and become a source of friction.

Although this volume focuses on Croatia, it provides a theoretically grounded and documented account of how issues from Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav pasts can, through the action of memory agents, affect present-day political divisions in individual countries of the region and set the tone of bilateral and multilateral relations. For the readers new to the concept of memory politics and discourse analysis the book will be an introduction and a practical guide to the subject. First, because it demonstrates how political actors alter commemorative narratives to fit their views and agendas, showcasing how interpretations of the past legitimate present-day policies. Also, the concepts of collective memory, memory culture, mnemonic agents and their strategies and the practices through which collective memories are (re)produced are well elaborated and illustrated. Researchers will benefit from detailed descriptions of narrative (re)production through mnemonic practices in Croatia and from the volume's diverse methodological approaches to studying the construction of collective identities through remembrance practices. This is particularly the case for the researchers of the post-Yugoslav region, as the tools developed in *Framing the Nation* do not require much adaptation and come ready-made

---

4 *European Memory Framework* is a set of policies, resolutions, decisions made primarily by the European Parliament – that both reflect and guide collective political attitudes towards the past (Milošević and Touquet 2018).

for examining memory entrepreneurship related to the shared past and for decoding the implications of commemorations and political speeches to regional politics.

Building on the outputs of this book, what could contribute to further understanding of the role of commemorative practices in framing the national identity in Croatia is a deeper insight in the dynamics of their interaction with other means of narrative (re) production, such as recent history curricula and popular culture. Because of the inherent regional dimension of the Croatian interpretations of the past, it would also be interesting to learn how the commemorations affect representations of Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav region in the basic, but also in the contesting discourses.

The upsurge of revisionism in post-Yugoslav space is what makes this book politically relevant. It warns about the perils of the equalization of two totalitarianisms in the EU memory framework and its effects on the memory politics in former Yugoslav countries, opening doors to the relativization of fascism.<sup>5</sup> Another important warning concerns the adherence to the narrative of the on-going war, permeating the basic discourse in Croatia. Its consequences to everyday life are visible in Vukovar, whose population continues to live in a grim limbo of wartime memories, as hostages to memory entrepreneurs. The “war is not over yet” narrative also marks the current regional policy of Croatia and its relations with neighbours.

The existing political divisions in Croatia related to interpretations of the Second World War are also present at the regional scale, and on top of them, narratives about the post-Yugoslav conflict remain deeply confronted. This speaks to the need for examining and deconstructing the commemorative practices across the region in order to contribute to peace-promoting regional memory culture and *Framing the Nation* has made the first step.

**Ana Marjanović Rudan** is a doctoral student at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science. E-mail: ana.marjanovic.rudan@gmail.com.

---

5 More in Milošević A, Touquet H. 2018. “Unintended consequences: the EU memory framework and the politics of memory in Serbia and Croatia.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (3): 381–99.