Book Review

Vjeran Pavlaković / Davor Pauković, eds, 2019. *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities. Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia*, Abingdon, New York/NY: Routledge. 260 pp., ISBN 978-1-138-50401-1 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-1-315-14573-0 (eBook), £ 120 / £ 33.29

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This edited volume presents the results of a three-year project on memory politics in Croatia, encompassing broadly conceived fieldwork and analysis of the commemorative practices of political and civil society actors. The authors present unique insights into the ways in which both government and anti-hegemonic commemoration practices contribute to defining national identity or contest its official framing. A scarce three decades after the establishment of the Republic of Croatia as one of the successor states of Yugoslavia, and 75 years after the end of the Second World War, issues of historical remembrance are acutely present in Croatian society.

Memory politics have been at the forefront of political struggles across post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. As this publication shows, in Croatia, too, public controversies over the past have increased in recent years, mobilising people and emotions, and are fraught with rich symbolism. Certain Croatian controversies have attracted attention beyond Croatia's borders because of suspected revisionism, as exemplified by the continuing celebration of controversial historical figures. Beyond the need to understand memory politics in context, Croatia represents a fascinating case study of a country where national identity has been heavily (re)negotiated in the recent past. While scholars have engaged with Croatian memory politics and cultures of remembrance, a systematic account as presented in this volume has been lacking. The team of researchers gathered by editors *Vjeran Pavlaković* and *Davor Pauković* have developed a systematic approach to new data and cast an original perspective on the use of the past in recent nation-building efforts.

The contributors provide both historical and cultural contexts for recent controversies surrounding national identity and memory, and a close analysis of concrete commemorative practices. Their focus is not on history or national identity per se, but remembrance as a (collective) cultural practice through which a nation is framed, that is, inscribed into a specific identity matrix, and historical continuity in which sacrifices for the sake of the community define past rights and

wrongs. The multidisciplinary team of researchers observed seven important commemoration rituals over a period of three years, from 2014 to 2016. Most commemorations revolved around sites related to victims of the Second World War, such as the concentration camp in Jasenovac run by the Ustaša regime from 1941 to 1945 and the Austrian town of Bleiburg where victims of Tito's partisans are remembered, as well as sites relating to the "Homeland War" of 1991 to 1995—the latter in Vukovar and Knin. The contributing authors collected data on more than a hundred commemorative speeches and analysed their structure, the strategies employed by speakers, their symbolism, and the competing frameworks they advanced. The 11 chapters, compiled by individual authors, deal first with the historical and sociocultural contexts of cultural memory and the project's methodology; the second and third sections look at commemoration of the Second World War and the Homeland War, and finally, the fourth section discusses the influence of European and diaspora memory practices.

The project, and thus this volume, introduces Croatian memory culture as annually performed during a veritable "memory season" which starts in April each year and ends in July, with a final event in November. The analyses of speeches, attendance, and symbolic action by political and civil society figures, the Roman Catholic Church, far-right groups, and other "mnemonic warriors" allow the contributors to establish links between the individual performances of commemoration and the political and cultural strategies of the various societal groups. Indeed, the current political context of memory culture is one of strong polarisation between liberal and conservative political camps (*Pero Maldini*, "The Sociocultural and Ideological Determinants of Memory Culture in Croatian Society") who instrumentalise commemorations with ideologically opposed "'red' and 'black' interpretations of the past" (*Davor Pauković*, "Framing the Narrative about Communist Crimes in Croatia: Bleiburg and Jazovka", 100). *Vjeran Pavlaković* analyses how commemorative practices have been used as a platform for constructing opposing conceptual, ideological, and emotional frameworks that constitute and reproduce "rival communities of remembrance, each focussing on their own victims and painting the 'other' as exclusively perpetrators" ("Contested Sites and Fragmented Narratives: Jasenovac and Disruptions in Croatia's Commemorative Culture", 120).

The observed period—2014 to 2016—proved opportune, since the country saw several major alternations of power between the socialist and the right-wing camps. This made it possible to observe how commemoration practices were exploited by various actors and to which effect. The project was not, however, limited to such instrumentalisation or to the *prima facie* problematic aspects of Croatian memory culture. In order to shed light on less obvious aspects of commemoration, the authors apply the concept of "memory regime", a term that

signifies the way in which mnemonic controversies have developed larger implications for national politics and identity.

If the most explosive public controversies concern the Second World War, for example commemoration at the Bleiburg and Jasenovac sites, actual confrontation does not primarily or necessarily have to do with revisionism. Rather, as several of the contributors show, Croatia has changed its official “memory regimes” several times over the last 30 years, from the Yugoslav antifascist mnemonic regime to Franjo Tudjman's nationalist framework in the 1990s, then to a “Europeanised” version of antifascism, and finally to a regime focusing on—ethnic and Catholic—Croatian victimhood. An important aspect of the memory controversies has been their disrupting effect on hegemonic official frameworks. One such example is the way in which the antifascist framework was (re)strengthened during the EU accession process, and weakened once more following accession in 2013.

The volume includes analyses of both the official, government-led and EU-imposed memory politics that produced top-down commemoration normativities, and the bottom-up disruptive effects of popular culture and local resistances. In the third section, the contributors study sports clubs, veteran associations, the diaspora, and local groups, looking into the ways in which subtle symbols are utilised to strong effect in the political conflict over the various national frameworks, identity constructs, and political options. They complete the complex picture of how the past plays a continuous role in negotiating Croatia's national identity in a polarised political context.

In formerly communist Europe, the Second World War and its interpretation stirs controversial debate everywhere, as does the remembrance of communism. *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities* highlights Croatia's specific mnemonic legacies of both the Second World War and Titoist Yugoslavia, but also several concerns that the country shares with others—the effects of EU accession and the lasting shadow of (post)communism among them. The volume is an instructive read for anybody interested in memory politics.