

Serb and Croat Cooperation in the Discourse of Croatia's Commemorative Culture

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Abstract: This article analyzes the representation of the interethnic relations between Serbs and Croats in the discourse of the main national holidays, such as Veterans' Day (*Dan borca*) on 4 July, Uprising Day of the Peoples of Croatia (*Dan ustanka naroda Hrvatske*) on 27 July, and the Day of the Antifascist Struggle (*Dan antifašističke borbe*) on June 22 in Croatia. In the years following the World War Two until the 1980s, the discourse emphasized collaborative facets of the Serbo-Croat relations throughout the War. The commemorations dedicated to civilians who were victims of interethnic violence were downplayed, while the common struggle of the Serbs and the Croats against the enemy was stressed. The discourse began to change most emphatically in the 1980s, when civilians of interethnic violence started to be acknowledged and commemorated more openly in the context of the rising tensions along ethnic lines and significant political changes occurring both in Croatia and in the broader region of Southeast Europe.

Keywords: Commemorative culture, Yugoslavia, Croatia, World War Two, interethnic relations, Croats, Serbs

Introduction

This study examines the transformation of commemorations in Croatia that represent or symbolize instances of inter-ethnic cooperation between Serbs and Croats during the World War Two. It shows how the discourse accompanying these commemorations changed along with other political and socio-economic changes in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) before the country's disintegration. The Serb-Croat cooperation in the antifascist resistance movement had formed the core of the commemorative culture in the Socialist Republic of Croatia up until the 1980s, at which point local political actors (along with certain groups at the national level) pushed for a reevaluation of the historical narratives that challenged the official communist interpretations of the past. This paper is, therefore, organized around the following two analytically relevant historical periods: 1945-1980 and 1980-1990. More specifically, we examine the sites of memory and the discourse of three key commemorations related to World War Two in Croatia – Veterans' Day (*Dan borca*) on 4 July, Uprising Day of the Peoples of Croatia (*Dan ustanka naroda Hrvatske*) on 27 July, and the Day of the Antifascist Struggle (*Dan antifašističke borbe*) on June 22. The first two were fundamental components of the regime's policies of constructing narratives of the war that emphasized two aspects deemed crucial for building the new socialist state: the "Brotherhood and Unity" of Serbs and Croats, and the successful revolutionary struggle. The third commemoration, which was a local event during the socialist era on which this article focuses, eclipsed the other two after multiparty elections in Croatia in 1990 and became the only national holiday honoring the country's contribution in the victory over fascism.

These commemorations represent the processes of remembrance on many levels – national, republican, and local, as well as negotiated narratives between state officials and family members or survivors. During World War Two, the fascist Ustaša regime committed horrific atrocities against Serb civilians, while the extremist Serbian Četnik movement, and to a lesser extent the communist-led Partisans, carried out reprisal attacks against Croats and Muslims. The socialist regime's strategy at shaping the post-war

culture of memory, however, downplayed commemorative rituals for civilian victims of interethnic violence and instead highlighted the common struggle against “the occupiers and domestic traitors.” The goal was to patch up Croat-Serb animosity at a time when the new regime was carrying out a radical social revolution, but the methods involved rigid selective memory and a totalitarian approach at controlling the official narratives of the war. Monuments and commemorative speeches at times were vague about the ethnic identity of either victims or perpetrators, while in other cases were more explicit. Nevertheless, the holidays, memorials, and commemorative events related to World War Two were *generally* celebrations of battles and the development of the antifascist struggle, and not ceremonies dedicated to civilian victims, at least not until the 1980s when the commemorative culture experienced dramatic changes along with the rest of Yugoslav society.

While this study mostly examines the national-level commemorative discourse, a number of examples will be drawn from regions such as Lika and Banovina (Banija) where the violence during World War Two, as well as during the break of Yugoslavia in the last decade of the twentieth century, was particularly intense. This article is a preliminary draft resulting from more detailed fieldwork conducted in Gospić about local commemorative discourses about World War Two violence around that town. In the early 1990s, the city of Gospić and the surrounding area was also the site of several well-known military clashes and civilian massacres, categorized as ethnic cleansing by academic, policy, and media analysts. Thus, the overall goal of our research pertaining to commemorations is to show how the culture of memory of World War Two was constructed not only by the regime but also by the local residents of distinct ethnicities during the socialist period. In some instances, the national and the local commemorative discourses were complimentary, while in other cases they clashed.

We situate our study theoretically and conceptually in the literature of collective memory and collective identity formation.¹ A “collective memory” may be seen as one of the elements of collective identity, such as an ethnic identity, for instance.² However, in this work, we will employ the “distributed version of collective memory” in contrast to the “strong version.”³ Similar to definitions of collective identity, collective memory may also be conceptualized along a primordialist-constructivist continuum. The strong version of collective memory, which resembles a primordialist perspective, in Wertsch’s words,

¹ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Francesca Cappelletto, “Public Memories and Personal Stories: Recalling the Nazi-fascist Massacres,” *Memory and World War II: An Ethnographic Approach*, ed. Francesca Cappelletto (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Heike Karge, “Mediated Remembrance: Local Practices of Remembering the Second World War in Tito’s Yugoslavia,” *European Review of History* 16, no. 1 (2009); David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989); Maria Todorova, “Introduction: Learning Memory, Remembering Identity,” *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: New York University Press, 2004); James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

² Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, ed. Waker Connor, *Ethnonationalism in Comparative Perspective* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

³ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, pp. 20-21.

“assumes that some sort of collective mind or consciousness exists above and beyond the minds of the individuals in a collective.”⁴ In contrast, we follow Wertsch in considering collective memory as “mediated remembering,” or “as a form of mediated action, which entails the involvement of active agents and cultural tools.”⁵ “Remembrance” is a term that more accurately refers to the commemorative processes this paper addresses rather than collective memory, because in these processes, the agency, or “action of groups and individuals in the light of day” play a critical role.⁶ Rather than a “passive memory,” which consists of personal recollections that are not communicated or expressed, personal memories matter only “when people enter the public domain and comment about the past – their own personal past, their family past, their national past, and so on – they bring with them images and gestures derived from their broader social experience.”⁷

Commemorations, along with other political rituals such as rallies, parades, anniversaries, and other mass gatherings, are symbolic public activities that political elites attempt to use to convey their values. Anthropologist David I. Kertzer has written on the prevalence of political rituals, replete with emotional, historical, and national symbols, in every political system, regardless of whether it is a democracy with free market capitalism or an authoritarian regime with a state-run economy.⁸ Additionally, the commemorative speech plays a key role in political rituals, and as Titus Ensink and Cristoph Sauer have shown in their discourse analysis of the Warsaw Uprising commemoration, “without a speech, a commemoration cannot come to pass.”⁹ In short, the focus of analysis is on the processes of memory, or identity, formation, such as commemorative practices. By examining commemorations of traumatic events such as World War Two we can see how the various administrations adopted different strategies in constructing narratives of that violence, either as examples of Serb-Croat cooperation or as nationalist arguments against multiethnic coexistence of the two peoples.

1941: Fascist terror and Partisan resistance

World War Two on the territory of Yugoslavia was not a clear cut struggle between foreign occupiers and a revolutionary guerrilla movement, but a multisided civil war which included the systematic persecution of rival ethnic and religious groups for over four bloody years. After the Axis invasion and dismemberment of Yugoslavia in April 1941, Hitler and Mussolini enabled the Ustaše, a radical Croat nationalist movement and terrorist organization, to establish Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*) on the territory of what is today Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Ustaša regime in Zagreb wasted little time in defining its vision of the Croatian nation-state, rapidly issuing decrees and racial laws (such as the law on Aryans and non-Aryans enacted on 30 April 1941), stripping Serbs, Jews, Roma, and eventually their political opponents of all of their rights. Mass arrests, persecutions, murders, forced

⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*; Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 17; Winter and Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance*, 6.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 2-3.

⁹ Titus Ensink and Cristoph Sauer, “A Discourse Analytic Approach to the Commemorative Speeches about the Warsaw Uprising,” in Titus Ensink, ed., *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty Years after the Warsaw Uprising* (Philadelphia, Penn.: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), p. 29.

conversions to Catholicism, and deportations followed in the atmosphere created by the newly installed dictatorship. Although apologists of the Ustaše argue the repressive measures were justified because Serbs were rebelling against the state, there is evidence that mass atrocities against Serb civilians in Veljun, Gudovac, and other places in the regions of Lika, Kordun, and Banija took place in the spring of 1941, before any organized uprisings led by communists or Četniks had taken place.¹⁰

The murder of over three hundred Serbs in Glina on 13 May 1941, followed by the massacre of hundreds of others from local villages several months later in or around the town's Orthodox Church (the numbers and exact dates remain bitterly contested) was one of the most notorious examples of Ustaša violence towards the civilian population.¹¹ It was this Ustaša terror against Serbs that directly fueled the subsequent uprisings. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ – *Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*) had been planning for an armed uprising since April, but it was the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June that served as the spark for the formation of the first Partisan unit in Croatia, in a forest near the industrial town of Sisak.¹² Led by Vladimir Janjić-Capo and Marijan Cvetković, this unit of mostly Croats sabotaged the important railway nearby, representing the first act of armed resistance in Croatia.¹³ Other acts of resistance spread across Croatia, especially in Zagreb, where the communists had many members and sympathizers. On 4 July, the day subsequently celebrated as Veterans' Day, the Central Committee of the KPJ issued a call for an armed uprising throughout Yugoslavia.

It was in the regions of Banovina south of the Kupa River and in Lika along the Croatian-Bosnian border with large Serb populations where the massive armed uprising took place in the summer of 1941 in the NDH. Partisans attacked an Ustaša outpost in Banski Grabovac on the night of 23/24 July, which was followed by massive reprisals against the innocent civilian population. The towns of Srb and Donji Lapac, located in isolated valleys along the Una River, served as the staging area for the Serb uprising against Ustaša extremism in Lika, in coordination with Bosnian Serbs in Drvar. They had heard of the mass reprisal killing of 300 to 400 Serbs in Veljun in early May¹⁴ and the systematic imprisonment (and subsequent murder) of Serbs and Jews around Gospić in the Jadovno camp.¹⁵ In early July, an Ustaša unit under the command of Vjekoslav Maks

¹⁰ Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008* (Zagreb: EPH, 2008), pp. 263-267.

¹¹ Due to a lack of documentation, questionable postwar eye-witness testimonies, incomplete exhumations of the victims, and a reluctance by the socialist authorities to fully investigate the event, the number of victims and the exact location of their murders remains hotly debated, but the most reliable estimates suggest about 2,000 Serbs were killed in Glina between May and early August. See Branko Vujasinović, Čedo Višnjčić, and Đuro Roksandić, *Glina 13. maja 1941.* (Zagreb: Srpsko kulturno društvo Prosvjeta, 2011); Đuro Aralica, *Ustaški pokolj Srba u glinskoj crkvi* (Belgrade: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2010); and Tomislav Vuković, "Ustaški pokolj u pravoslavnoj crkvi u Glini: povjesni događaj ili mit", in *Glas Koncila*, Nos. 35 - 52 (27 August 2006 – 25 December 2006).

¹² Nikola Anić, *Narodnooslobodilačka vojska Hrvatske, 1941–1945.* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Republike Hrvatske, 2005), p. 20-21.

¹³ Goldstein, *Hrvatska*, p. 279

¹⁴ Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2007), pp. 97-101.

¹⁵ The Jadovno camp existed briefly, from 25 June 1941 until 21 August 1941, but it is estimated that over 30,000 victims were killed and dumped into the karst pits located in the vicinity, Deverić, Mišo and Ivan Fumić. *Hrvatska u logorima 1941-45* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Republike Hrvatske, 2008), pp.43-44.

Luburić carried out a number of attacks against Serbs in Suvaja, Bujanj, Osredak, and Nebljusi (villages near Srb and Donji Lapac), driving the local population “on an irreversible path towards an uprising.”¹⁶ On 27 July, Serb villagers in Srb and in Drvar organized a massive uprising, nominally under the command of a local KPJ cell, attacking all symbols of the NDH regime and ambushing Ustaša and Domobran forces sent to restore order. The postwar socialist regime designated 27 July as the official Uprising Day for Croatia, and it was celebrated already in the summer of 1945.

Although the uprising in Srb was commemorated as a Partisan and communist rebellion, in reality the situation was considerably more complicated. The communists were relatively few in number, and were basically taking advantage of an almost spontaneous Serb uprising in reaction to Ustaša atrocities. Moreover, a significant number of the rebels fell under the influence of Četniks led by local pre-war politicians who promoted a Greater Serb agenda that included horrific reprisal attacks against the few Croat and Muslim settlements in the region, notably the destruction of Boričevac and Kulen Vakuf in August and September. Reflecting on the nature of the uprising in Lika and the Bosnian Krajina, Marko Attila Hoare characterizes it as

a Serb rebel formation in the tradition of the rebel regimes established in Bosnia during the uprising of 1875–1878, upon which a Communist leadership based in the urban center of Drvar had been superimposed. Although the Communists at its head spoke with the rhetoric of internationalism, many of the rebel leaders and troops it encompassed were Serb-nationalist in orientation.¹⁷

The Četnik leaders took advantage of the weak communist influence to come to a ceasefire agreement with Italian commanders shortly after the uprising, and for the rest of the war the Partisans fought desperately to wrest the local population from the control of the Četnik forces.

The year 1941 was therefore characterized by massive violence against innocent civilian populations as well as the beginnings of the Partisan resistance movement, which would eventually take power and radically transform the Yugoslav state. The legitimacy of the post-war socialist regime was based upon the memories of the National Liberation Struggle (NOB - *Narodnooslobodilčka borba*), as World War Two was referred to in the SFRJ, but the question was which memories would be chosen in the official narratives? Could a focus on the victims of mutual bloodletting serve as the foundation for the envisioned future socialist utopia promised by the Party and its leader, Josip Broz Tito? Or would the heroic common struggle of the multiethnic Partisan forces overshadow the voices of the surviving victims in those regions that had seen the worst internecine killings? And could the memory of those who had fought and died on “the wrong side” be somehow included in the metanarrative of the new Yugoslavia emerging from the ashes of war? The socialist regime opted for a commemorative culture, which tightly controlled the narrative of the war, in which the victims were marginalized while Serb-Croat cooperation was pushed relentlessly through the mantra of “Brotherhood and

¹⁶ Goldstein, 1941., pp. 125-126; Danilo Damjanović Danić, *Ustanak naroda Hrvatske 1941. u Srbu i okolini* (Zagreb: Progres, 1972), pp. 44-45.

¹⁷ Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and Chetniks 1941–1943* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 134.

Unity”. The genuine cooperation between Croats, Serbs, and all of the other nationalities in Yugoslavia had gradually become associated with a hollow bureaucratic phrase that the citizens of Croatia and other republics no longer believed. When the socialist system itself began to crumble, so did the accompanying narratives of World War Two. The proverbial baby was thrown out with the bath water; nationalist victimization narratives and the memories of those who had been killed by the Partisans increasingly replaced the legacy of Serb-Croat cooperation, which had been crucial in the antifascist struggle.

Constructing narratives and commemorative practices in the SFRJ: 1945 – 1980

In addition to securing a complete monopoly on power, crushing the remaining collaborationist forces, and carrying out a communist revolution, the newly installed Titoist regime had to contend with healing badly damaged interethnic relations after four years of civil war, especially in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In regions such as Lika, which had seen massive atrocities by Ustaša forces, overzealous communists (at times supported by the local Serb population) carried out reprisals against Croats suspected of collaboration with the NDH that often resulted in the imprisonment or even execution of innocent civilians. While towns such as Gospić had been Ustaša strongholds and experienced significant activity by *Križari* (Crusaders) in the post-war period, the communist leadership in Croatia realized it had to put an end to revenge killings and eruptions of Serb chauvinism that threatened to undermine the new government.¹⁸ In August 1945, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia discussed the challenges in repairing Croat-Serb postwar relations and noted that some 60,000 people had attended the first Uprising Day commemoration (27 July 1945) in the Banovina region.¹⁹ Moreover, they reflected upon the fact that over 7,000 individuals attended the ceremony when authorities transferred Marko Orešković’s bones to a crypt in the town of Korenica, and many of them were crying. A Croat from Lika, Orešković had fought in the Spanish Civil War and was commanded by the Partisan leadership to repair Serb-Croat relations in the region, earning the trust of both peoples before being murdered by Četniks in October 1941. He was immortalized in a poem that was engraved on the monument that stood over his grave in Korenica:

*Drug je Marko hrvatskoga roda,
Al je majka srpskoga naroda.*

¹⁸ The *Križari* were bands of anticommunist guerrillas that were composed of Ustaša and other collaborationist units that had fled into the forests and hills after the war, and continued to resist the new regime until being completely suppressed in the early 1950s. See Zdenko Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj, 1945-1950* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011), p. 224-225.

¹⁹ Transcript of meeting of the CK KPH on 3 August 1945 in Branislava Vojnović, ed., *Zapisnici politbiroa centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 1945-1952*, Vol. 1 (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2005), p. 83. Referring to the situation in Slavonia, one member of the Central Committee reported that the main tasks are “to eliminate chauvinism and create brotherhood and unity among Serbs and Croats...both Serbs and Croats feel insecure.” Ibid., p. 84.

Comrade Marko is a Croat by birth,
But he is [like] a mother to the Serbian people.²⁰

Rather than building a commemorative culture based on the victims of war, the majority of whom were killed because they were Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Jews, or other ethno-national identities, the socialist regime's culture of memory was centered on celebrations dedicated to the elements of the Partisan war that served to reinforce the values of the new Yugoslav society: Brotherhood and Unity, and nurturing the revolutionary tradition.²¹

Although both national and local practices in building monuments and establishing the commemorative calendar closely held to these values during the socialist period, the exact wording on memorials, the events and individuals local communities chose to remember, and discourse of speeches held at commemorative manifestations were often negotiated and modified to fit the specific situations. For example, the introduction to a volume cataloging monuments around the city of Sisak notes that many of them were constructed without the coordination of the authorities:

Many of the memorials were erected without previously consulting expert institutions, so it is understandable that there were occasional oversights in their construction. Climactic conditions were ignored when choosing building materials, the conceptualization and construction of the memorials was entrusted to unskilled individuals, and the texts on the monuments are frequently vaguely worded and grammatically incorrect.²²

Whereas the Sisak example reveals the lack of coordination between national and local authorities, as well as the construction of monuments resulting from the initiatives of various interest groups, there are other cases where the manipulation of how the war was memorialized was more deliberate. Max Bergholz has shown how innocent Muslim and Croat civilians killed in Kulen Vakuf in the summer of 1941 were never commemorated because they were murdered by Serb insurgents who later joined the Partisans and even held important postwar political positions.²³ Standard monuments listed two categories of war casualties – fallen Partisans and victims of fascist terror – and in the case of Kulen Vakuf those civilians fit neither category. Those killed fighting on the “wrong side” (or killed in postwar reprisals) were completely erased from the official culture of memory. Moreover, on 6 July 1945 the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior issued an order to destroy all graveyards and monuments of the occupiers and collaborators. Historian Zdenko Radelić argues that this “disrespect for the traditions of the culture of death and the humane principles of equally honoring all the victims resulted in the strengthening of

²⁰ Josip Barković, “Narodni heroj Marko Orešković,” *Likovi narodnih heroja Hrvatske*, vol. 2 (Zagreb: Izdavačko poduzeće “27 July”, 1953). The monument was destroyed by extremist Serbs in the 1990s.

²¹ See Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, “Politička sjećanja na Drugi svjetski rat u doba medijske reprodukcije socijalističke kulture,” in Lada Čale Feldman and Ines Prica (eds.), *Devijacije i promašaji: Etnografija domaćeg socijalizma* (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, 2006), p. 166

²² Ivica Šuštić, *Spomenici revolucionarnog radničkog pokreta, NOB-a i socijalističke revolucije na području općine Sisak* (Sisak: Muzej Sisak, 1982), p. 5.

²³ Max Bergholz, “The Strange Silence: Explaining the Absence of Monuments for Muslim Civilians Killed in Bosnia during the Second World War,” in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2010).

divisions between the two conflicted sides and fostered hatred and a desire for revenge on the defeated side.”²⁴ Occasionally, certain collective remembrances presented interpretations of the past that clashed with the official narrative of regime, which would subsequently result in the intervention by the authorities.²⁵

The text on the monuments erected around Gospić in the 1950s and 1960s reveal how the official narratives were increasingly standardized as the regime took a greater interest in wresting the culture of memory away from local collective remembrances. The monument in Kruškovac (built in 1956), where Ustaša units killed over 900 civilians fleeing from Divoselo and other villages, described how the victims “died in unnatural agony” at the hands of “Ustaša criminals.”²⁶ In Mlakva, another village near Gospić, locals had organized the erection of a monument a year earlier that contained even more graphic descriptions of violence: “On 4.VIII.1941, Ustaša criminals massacred and burned 270 innocent patriots and victims in this village.”²⁷ A decade later, the texts on newly erected monuments were more ambiguous about the perpetrators and focused more on the unified struggle of Croats and Serbs. One memorial on the outskirts of Divoselo erected on Veterans’ Day in 1964 celebrated the Partisan defense of the village in November 1941 from an “attack by traitors,” which was described as “the strongest hymn of freedom, the hymn of brotherhood and unity of Serbs and Croats.”²⁸ Another monument dedicated on the same day in Smiljan featured the following poetic inscription:

One living spark
Turns everything into a flame, brotherhood and unity
Opens the sunny path forward.

One living spark
Entwined the brotherly hearts
Croats and Serbs, Serbs and Croats
And led them to freedom.²⁹

The inscriptions on the memorials were hardly uniform, but there is a noticeable shift by the mid-1960s in how mass violence against civilians was described and an increased emphasis on Croat-Serb cooperation that continued up through the 1980s.

National-level concerns about the local-level inter-ethnic relations in the aftermath of the World War Two were evident, for example, in the discussions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia. During a meeting in August 1945,

²⁴ Radelić, *Križari*, p. 227.

²⁵ For example, when a local priest in a Serbian town initiated the construction of a memorial plaque with the names of both Partisans and Četniks who were killed in the war, the authorities reacted quickly to punish this remembrance that stepped outside of the permissible boundaries established by the regime. See Max Bergholz, “When All Could No Longer Be Equal in Death: A Local Community’s Struggle to Remember Its Fallen Soldiers in the Shadow of Serbia’s Civil War, 1955–1956,” *Carl Beck Papers* (November 2008).

²⁶ Državni arhiv u Gospiću (HR-DAGS), fond 206 (Spomenici NOB-a 1948-1963), box 3, “Kruškovac”.

²⁷ HR-DAGS, fond 206 (Spomenici NOB-a 1948-1963), box 3, “Mlakva”.

²⁸ HR-DAGS, fond 206 (Spomenici NOB-a 1948-1963), box 3, “Divoselo”.

²⁹ HR-DAGS, fond 206 (Spomenici NOB-a 1948-1963), box 3, “Smiljan”.

high-ranking Croatian communist Vladimir Bakarić reported that Serb celebrations such as those of St. Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*, celebrated on June 28 and commemorating the Battle of Kosovo in 1389) and St. George's Day (*Đurđevdan*, celebrated on May 6, a religious "saint-protector" of Serbian families and communities) made Croats in the regions of Banovina (Banija) and Lika feel excluded:

There is a significant rise in intolerance. In Gradiška, the Croats are saying they are second-class citizens. The same is true in Banija and Lika. Brotherhood is not being promoted and a clear policy against intolerance is lacking. It is a principal task of the Main Committee of the Serbs and Prosvjeta [the leading cultural organization of Croatia's Serbs, V.P.] to educate the Serbs in the spirit of brotherhood. Committees should be organized only where necessary. Therefore, it was not right to create special committees across villages and to invent some big celebrations, such as *Vidovdan* and *Đurđevdan*.³⁰

A different speaker, however, promoted a policy to continue the celebrations of *Vidovdan* only in parts of Kosovo and Dalmatia where the traditions of such celebrations had previously existed.³¹ The discussion continued along similar lines with a recommendation that the secretary of the Association of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ – *Savez komunista omladine Jugoslavije*,) in Lika be replaced because he "did not know anything about the national question."³² Another speaker added that the failure to arrest Alojzije Stepinac, the Catholic priest who was charged for crimes against the people and the state in 1946, only encouraged the Church to promote religion to the youth quite openly.³³ Kata Pejnović, who was honored as a hero of the NOB in Lika, had suggested at a different occasion earlier that the Orthodox church in Gospić be demolished, but one of the speakers disagreed with words that such act would not be correct since "even the Ustaša had not destroyed it throughout the war."³⁴ These discussions illustrate how the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia was not only well aware of the inter-ethnic animosity in certain parts of Croatia but also that the policy of promoting the Brotherhood and Unity was an important task of the Party and the state leaders and representatives in order to prevent any further escalation of intolerance along ethnic or religious lines.

Rather than build a culture of memory which was centered on commemorating civilian victims, the socialist authorities instead promoted celebrations of the multiethnic

³⁰ Transcript of meeting of the CK KPH on 3 August 1945 in Branislava Vojnović, ed., *Zapisnici politbiroa centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 1945-1952*, Vol. 1 (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2005), p.215.

³¹ Transcript of meeting of the CK KPH on 3 August 1945 in Branislava Vojnović, ed., *Zapisnici politbiroa centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 1945-1952*, Vol. 2 (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2005), p.449.

³² Transcript of meeting of the CK KPH on 3 August 1945 in Branislava Vojnović, ed., *Zapisnici politbiroa centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 1945-1952*, Vol. 1 (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2005), p.216.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Transcript of meeting of the CK KPH on 3 August 1945 in Branislava Vojnović, ed., *Zapisnici politbiroa centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 1945-1952*, Vol. 2 (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2005), p.449.

antifascist struggle against the occupiers and domestic traitors, who were at various times nationally identified (i.e., Germans, Italians, Ustaše, Četniks, etc.) or left unmentioned. Each Yugoslav republic celebrated its own Uprising Day, and in the hierarchy of remembrance, Serbia's came first (7 July), followed by Montenegro (13 July), Slovenia (22 July), Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (27 July, commemorating the uprisings in Srb and Drvar), and finally Macedonia (11 October). Seeking to create a national memory day related to the uprising, in April 1956 the Party Central Committee chose 4 July (Veterans' Day – *Dan borca*) as the pan-Yugoslav uprising day, to commemorate the KPJ's call for armed struggle against the occupiers. Other important dates included May Day (1 May), Victory Day (9 May), the Day of Youth (25 May, celebrated as Tito's birthday), the Day of the Republic (29 November), and Army Day (22 December). Serbian sociologist Todor Kuljić's work on the culture of memory, highlighting the role of calendric rituals and public holidays in the construction of social memory, concludes that

the calendar, as a collection of national holidays, represents a selective national collective past...holidays, as institutionalized dates of memory, draw attention to not only what we need to remember, but when and how to remember. New holidays symbolized a radical break with the past.³⁵

Dates associated with the atrocities perpetrated in 1941 (such as the Glina massacres or Ustaša attacks on civilians in Kruškovac near Gospić) were commemorated by survivors, families of the victims, and local authorities, but were overshadowed by celebratory holidays of the National Liberation Struggle.

Veterans' Day and Uprising Day of the Peoples of Croatia were the most important celebrations that promoted the discourse of Croat-Serb cooperation during the war. The Yugoslav veterans' organization (SUBNOR) often dedicated and unveiled monuments on these two holidays, even if the date of the event was not related to either 4 July or 27 July. In addition to the ubiquitous political speeches by Party functionaries, Partisan veterans, and Army officials, these celebrations featured cultural events such as singing groups, youth work actions, and sporting contests. In Gospić, Uprising Day would be celebrated with athletic events (called "Oke") that would draw young people from Bela Krajina (Slovenia), Kordun, Banovina, Gorski kotar, and Bosanska Krajina (Bosnia-Herzegovina). Divoselo, a predominantly Serb village near Gospić, celebrated its contributions to the Partisan cause, such as the formation of various units, rather than dwell upon the causes and consequences of the interethnic violence such as the Kruškovac killings. While this strategy was in line with the socialist vision of a future utopian society, the collective memories of the victims were not erased but remained alive within the private sphere or in local communities; their ongoing suppression by the regime only fueled resentment and feelings of injustice.

1980-1990: Shifting Discourses from Partisans to Victims

In contrast to the pluralistic and democratic commemorative culture of World War Two in Western Europe that allowed the dominant historical narratives to be

³⁵ Todor Kuljić, *Kultura sećanja* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2006), pp. 173-174.

challenged, the SFRJ and the Soviet satellites of the Eastern bloc for the most part successfully controlled the official representations of the past up until the implosion of the communist regimes. Various countries in the West came to terms with the past at different times and in response to shifting political situations during the Cold War; West Germany and France looked at their roles in the Holocaust and collaboration more openly after the political upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s, Austria reluctantly acknowledged its participation in Nazi crimes in the 1980s, and Italy to this day wavers between accepting guilt for the crimes of the fascist regime and its place among the victors. Although myths of the war (the majority of French in the Resistance, Austria as Hitler's first victim) existed in Western Europe, the democratic political systems allowed these myths to be challenged and for civil society to intervene into the culture of memory (commemorations, monuments, museums, etc.) when the official narratives no longer corresponded to the latest research results. Moreover, the nature of commemorating wars had changed significantly after World War Two and the Holocaust in comparison to earlier conflicts. As Jan-Werner Müller argues in the introduction to his edited volume on memory and politics in postwar Europe, "[t]here can indeed be little doubt that the Holocaust has been crucial to the shift from a 'history of the victors' or, in Nietzsche's terms, 'monumental history', to a 'history of the victims.'"³⁶ The difference between the memory politics in the West and in the SFRJ was therefore not only the inability to challenge the official narratives in the latter, but also the marginalization of entire categories of victims.

Although sites of interethnic massacres were usually memorialized with a monument, the inscriptions were often vague as to the identity of the victims and perpetrators, and were not part of the official commemorative calendar. Mass graves and karst pits holding the corpses of Ustaša or Četnik victims were sealed with concrete and forgotten. Serb peasants killed by Ustaše in the summer of 1941 in the village of Suvaja (near Srb) did not receive a monument, allegedly because local authorities believed it would provoke too anger and accusations of collective guilt; it was easier to focus the commemorative events on the uprising against fascism and to forget those brutally murdered by another ethnic group.³⁷ Those who fought in collaborationist units or were killed in post-war reprisals received no public memorials, and their bodies filled hundreds of unmarked graves in Slovenia, Croatia, and to a lesser extent the other former Yugoslav republics.³⁸ Jewish victims in World War Two in Yugoslavia were lumped in with other "victims of fascist terror" and not identified as having been murdered as part of the Holocaust. The few monuments that specifically referred to Jewish victims and the Holocaust were located in cemeteries, such as the monument designed by Belgrade architect Bogdan Bogdanović in 1952 in Belgrade's Jewish cemetery.

³⁶ Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

³⁷ Interview with Dragan Rodić and Nikola Čanak in Srb, Croatia, 25 November 2009.

³⁸ For example, the mine Huda jama in Slovenia contains the bodies of several thousand estimated executed collaborators (investigators in 2009 – 2010 recorded over 700 bodies sealed in several mine shafts), while hundreds of others have not been thoroughly examined. However, these postwar victims are easily manipulated in the Croatian press, which quickly identifies any discovered bodies as being Croats and labels them "innocent victims of communist terror" even before any proper investigation has been carried out. *Glas Istre* (16 June 2010), online version at <http://www.glasistre.hr/svijet/vijest/224578>.

Furthermore, the sites of concentration and extermination camps were sparsely marked. It was not until the mid-1960s that construction of a memorial park began at the site of the NDH's most notorious concentration camp Jasenovac, the subject of considerable debates about the number of victims, which was officially listed as 700,000.³⁹ SUBNOR eventually chose Bogdan Bogdanović's design of a concrete "Flower", symbolizing "indestructible life", as the central monument. Work on the monument lasted from 1964 until the opening ceremony on 4 July 1966.⁴⁰ Construction on a museum was begun in September 1967 and completed in July 1968, the same year the Jasenovac Memorial Area Institution was established to administer the site. As noted by Heike Karge, the Yugoslav socialist regime concentrated all memorialization of civilian victims in Jasenovac and suggested that all ethnic groups were killed there equally, even though the NDH specifically targeted the Serb population.⁴¹ In a speech referring to Jasenovac, Tito stated that the camp was a place "where the Ustaše killed Serbs and Croats equally by the tens of thousands," while a book dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the memorial site informed readers that Jasenovac was "the biggest mass grave of all of the peoples and nationalities [of Yugoslavia]."⁴² Even in commemorating the victims of the Ustaša genocide there were efforts to fit it into the Brotherhood and Unity narrative. Meanwhile, the sites of other concentration camps such as Kapor (on the island of Rab), Jadovno (in the hills near Gospić), and Staro Sajmište (near Belgrade) were hardly given any kind of memorial marker at all.

The death of Tito in May 1980 sparked a crisis that contributed to the unraveling of the Yugoslav state a decade later. The regime relied even more on state holidays and commemorations of World War Two to maintain legitimacy, although the economic crisis, the weakening of European communism, and the rise of nationalism exposed these political rituals as desperate attempts to keep the Party in power. Noted publicist Slavko Goldstein recalled that eventually

[t]he commemorations of heroes turned into routine, everyday events, boring and tiresome just like any other imposed routine, while children had to repeat pathetic, formulaic stories about these heroes for their homework assignments. And just as every inflation leads to devaluation, the inflation of these heroes ultimately led to their devaluation.⁴³

As the commemorative events celebrating Serb-Croat cooperation in the antifascist struggle increasingly became perceived as meaningless performances by out of touch

³⁹ For details about the various estimates of Jasenovac victims and the ensuing political debates, see Vjeran Pavlaković, "Red Stars, Black Shirts: Symbols, Commemorations, and Contested Histories of World War Two in Croatia," National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, *Working Paper* (2008).

⁴⁰ Duško Lončar, *Deset godina spomen-područja Jasenovac* (Jasenovac: Spomen-područje Jasenovac, 1977), pp. 13–14.

⁴¹ Conference paper delivered by Heike Karge at conference on Staro Sajmište, Belgrade, 11 May 2012.

⁴² Duško Lončar, *Deset godina spomen-područja Jasenovac* (Jasenovac: Spomen-područje Jasenovac, 1977), pp. 13–14. A statement issued by the Jasenovac advisory board in response to lower estimates of the number of victims emphasizes that the number of 700,000 cannot be challenged, and moreover, the legacy of the concentration camp only encourages the Yugoslav peoples to "further develop Brotherhood and Unity." *Večernji list* (4 April 1981), p. 29.

⁴³ Goldstein, *1941.*, p. 278.

communist apparatchiks, there was a renewed push to properly memorialize civilian victims of interethnic violence. In 1990, numerous reburials of Ustaša victims who were removed from sealed mass graves took place under the watchful eye of television cameras. These ritualized reburials, attended by Serb nationalist politicians and intellectuals, did not heal the wounds of the past but heightened the fear of a resurgent Ustaša state that would once again fill the karst pits with the dead bodies of Serbs.⁴⁴ Outside of Zagreb, the discovery of the Jazovka mass grave opened up the question of postwar Partisan liquidations. While in many respects this was necessary to fully remove the veil of silence that had lasted decades and to liberate the memory of the victims from the ideological straightjacket of the Party, the resurgence of victimization narratives would prove to be fertile ground for the emerging nationalist elites in Serbia and Croatia who manipulated these collective memories for a new cycle of violence.

Two examples from Glina and Gospić in the 1980s show how the shift in the discourse and focus of commemorative events came at a time of rising nationalism and the loss of the regime's legitimacy. Glina's SUBNOR organization, along with local intellectuals and other citizens, supported an initiative to create a museum in the memorial building (*Spomen dom*) that had been built in 1969 on the site of the Orthodox Church destroyed by the Ustaše after the massacres in the summer of 1941. The supporters of the initiative argued that the existing memorial building lacked any symbols or visual components that would provide proper remembrance for what had happened at that site. Moreover, the building had been used for office space by the local administration, a library, a hall that hosted balls and youth dances, and even a movie theater that showed Western films instead of ideologically appropriate Partisan epics.⁴⁵ The initial proposal for the new museum, approved in 1989, included a vast majority of exhibits dedicated to the Partisan resistance movement, but in the ensuing years when Glina was part of the Republika Srpska Krajina parastate, the museum concept changed into a graphic portrayal of the Ustaša atrocities.⁴⁶ The space in front of the memorial building was redesigned to resemble the entrance of a church, while the interior would feature mosaics of the victims being slaughtered, even though recent scholarship has shown that the precise events remain murky and the witness testimonies unreliable.⁴⁷ The Glina example illustrates how efforts to properly commemorate the victims were hijacked by those who used the Ustaše crimes to justify the expulsion and murder of Glina's non-Serbs in the 1990s.

In Gospić, maintaining the narratives of Brotherhood and Unity served to keep the peace in an ethnically mixed region with a dark past. Veterans' Day and Uprising Day were always big celebrations, and the local paper *Ličke novine* carried extensive coverage of the festivities and youth actions that accompanied these memorial days. However, the

⁴⁴ Ozren Žunec, *Goli život: socijalne dimenzije pobune srba u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Demetra, 2007), p. 423. Anthropologist Katherine Verdery has written extensively about the political impact of these reburials in Yugoslavia and other East European countries in *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ *Glinski vjesnik*, nos. 30-31 (1982), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁶ Arhiv Sisak (AS), Spomen-muzej Glina, no. 2194-01-89-1, "Odluka o učešću u financiranju izgradnje spomen-obilježja u Glini," 1 June 1989.

⁴⁷ AS, Spomen-muzej Glina, "Spomen obeležje u Glini" pamphlet (1995).

foothills of the Velebit mountain range above Gospić hid the unmarked graves of perhaps as many as 30,000 victims of the Jadovno extermination camp, which existed for just a few months in the summer of 1941. Serbs, Jews, and Croats opposed to the Ustaša regime were brought there from various parts of the NDH, executed, and thrown into karst pits. A few simple monuments marked the location of the camp, and the occasional commemoration focused primarily on youth competitions and military maneuvers, while both victims and perpetrators were left vague in the commemorative speeches. For example, in 1973 several thousand young pioneers and other citizens gathered at the former location of the camp and listened to the speech by Milan Rukavina, the vice president of the Croatian Sabor's Executive Council, who reflected upon the nature of the camp and its victims:

[Y]ou are here to honor and remember the tens of thousands of men, women, and children who were thrown into pits and abysses across the Velebit mountain range for one single reason: because they hated fascism and they rose up against the enemy and the quisling forces. In Jadovno everyone who rose up against fascism and refused to acknowledge the occupation was killed, these were all patriots and were of all nations and nationalities...⁴⁸

The official narrative defined the Ustaša crimes within the scope of the antifascist struggle even though the vast majority of the victims were civilians who had nothing to do with the resistance movement.

In the 1980s, as the focus shifted to the victims, local groups complained openly that Jadovno had been marginalized and that the memorial space needed to be expanded. In an article from 1985, the author calls for the creation of a committee to introduce a new approach to commemorating the victims that was significantly different from the official narrative:

Forty years of peace and freedom have passed since the end of World War Two, which witnessed the darkest slaughterhouses of human kind and the never before seen genocide, barbarity, and bestiality of the dark forces of fascism and their bloody henchmen, Ustaše and Četniks. From the end of the war until today there were efforts to properly mark this memorial place, but unfortunately these all ended in meager symbolic actions (placing a few memorial plaques, the occasional visit, and some other minor activities).⁴⁹

The initiative resulted in numerous articles and memoirs of camp survivors in the following years, as well as the partial construction of a monument near one of the karst pits (*Šaranova jama*) that was destroyed by Croatian extremists in the 1990s. As Gospić descended into war in 1991, victimization narratives by both Serbs and Croats replaced the memories of the unified struggle against fascism, culminating in new atrocities and the destruction of most World War Two monuments in the Lika region.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ličke novine* (15 June 1973), p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Lički vjesnik* (15 November 1985), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Although some of the monuments have been restored, including the ones in Jadovno and Srb, others remain devastated reminders of the erasing of memories, while new monuments were erected to

Conclusion

In this study, which examined Croatia's commemorative culture during the communist period from 1945 until 1990, we showed how the commemorations and the accompanying narratives of traumatic events from the World War Two aimed to promote inter-ethnic peace through the imposed policy of Brotherhood and Unity. This was achieved, for instance, by emphasizing the inter-ethnic cooperation, or the "common struggle" against the same enemy (i.e. fascists), while failing to, or vaguely, acknowledging the victims' and perpetrators' identities in commemorative events or monuments in cases when events were decided to be commemorated in the first place. For instance, the commemoration of the Uprising Day in Srb was framed as a Partisan rebellion, even though the local Serb rebels were actually influenced by the Četniks. Given that World War Two manifested itself as a complex war on the territory of Croatia, involving multiple armies and innocent victims on more than just two sides, the attempt to construct a simple narrative that it was a struggle of the people of Croatia, both Serbs and Croats, against the occupier was bound to lose legitimacy as soon as the communist regime began to crumble. Indeed, the inter-ethnic tolerance constructed around the imposed policy of Brotherhood and Unity started to erode in the 1980s as tensions along ethnic lines started to reemerge in Croatia in the context of broader societal and political changes associated with liberalization and democratization processes.

The focus of the analysis in this paper was how national level narratives influence the change in the national and local commemorative culture, with emphasis on the region of Lika and Banija. However, political regimes and state leaders, regardless of their ability to control the state through force, do not have an unlimited ability to mold and shape popular consciousness. The top-down accounts of the construction of collective memories or identities, therefore, provide only part of the story. It is also necessary to examine the bottom-up, or local, processes of commemorations or remembrances, as they play an important role in explaining why and when national attempts of imposing dominant discourses and narratives of traumatic war-related events are successful. Also, the local level of analysis provides an answer to the question why such attempts resonate with some individuals and not with others. Hence, in the future extension of this work, we plan to examine the extent to which local memory traces, or remembrance processes, in the area surrounding the Croatian town of Gospić, such as commemorations of past waves of violence and family narratives, conform or clash with the official state policies of a particular political regime that was in power at the time.

commemorate those who had died fighting in the armed forces of the NDH. For example, a large monument bearing several hundred names located in the village of Bilaja lists the fallen as "Martyrs of Communist and Četnik Terror, 1941–1995," a case where the casualties of World War Two and the Homeland War were blurred together.

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