

Red Stars, Black Shirts: Symbols, Commemorations, and Contested Histories of World War Two in Croatia

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Abstract

This paper examines how various commemorative events have taken on new meanings and significance in post-communist Croatia. Politicized rituals at various "sites of memory" (Pierre Nora's lieux de mémoire) symbolize the divided social memory and contested histories of World War Two. The nationalization of victims, and the manipulation of the number of victims, particularly at the emotionally powerful sites of Jasenovac and Bleiburg, characterizes the commemorations and debates surrounding them. In the context of Croatia's painful post-communist transition, bloody war for independence, and challenging democratization process, World War Two commemorations have been illustrative of how political rituals reflect (as well as influence) Croatian society's understanding of the recent past and national identity. The challenge for ensuring a stable democracy in Croatia is in building a consensus regarding the past, or at least creating an atmosphere of open dialogue rather than the violence seen throughout the twentieth century.