

Abstract

Recollection of past memories in Croatia: how processes of remembrance can build a new identity?

The main question that this essay answers is how memories of pre-communist Croatia were brought into the public fora and came to be dominating the discourse of late 1980s, which in turn led to the rise of new nationalism and was one of the reasons of the subsequent disintegration of Yugoslavia? Proxy questions that are related to this, are: how the new (nationalist) identity was shaped by these recollection of past memories? What role did the honoring of memory of the pre-communist period come to play in the aftermath of communism in Croatia? Finally and related, if were to paraphrase French historian Pierre Nora and adopt a narrow concept of its lieux de mémoire, what role did the commemoration processes, new emblems, anthems, mottoes, or institutions, as well as men, who make possible the creation of many of the means through which “memories are perpetuated” (Nora, 1996: xvii) came to play in the aftermath of communism in Croatia and forging of the new identity?

The case of Croatia, where patterns of a desire to re(built) a post-communist identity, based on strong national identification and exclusion of the other (non-Croat), were visible and encouraged, leading to a strong executive, under the leadership of Tudjman, is telling. This rebuilding process was forged through processes of commemoration, in an attempt to (re)create the past in the present and although at first sight this may sound counter-intuitive, it aimed at state-building, rather than nation-building, as Nora would have put it. Thus, it goes along the lines of Francis Fukayama, when he reminds us that: “[the] overwhelming bulk of wars (including Yugoslavia) have not been related to democracy, but to state-building” (Fukayama, 2007).