



Bleiburg commemoration site

Author: Pigpanter, Source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gedenkst%C3%A4tte_f%C3%BCr_die_Opfer_des_Massakers_von_Bleiburg.jpg

Croatia's Ambivalence over the Past: Intertwining Memories of Communism and Fascism

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How does Croatia come to terms with the violent history of 20th century wars? Croatian society is deeply polarized over the narratives of the Second World War. Moreover, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s have been framed within the imagery of the Second World War and are understood either as a continuation of that war, or as the same event conducted under new circumstances. This results in an intertwining of the memories of communism, fascism and the recent Yugoslav wars.

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Croatia's Ambivalence over the Past: Intertwining Memories of Communism and Fascism

There is a band from Split named TBF, with a song called "The End of the World" (Smak svita) in which there is the following verse:

And in the Parliament this morning the same imbecility,
whose father was Ustasha and who is partisan,
and considering that today is a cataclysm,
they sent out a note to let us into Europe without waiting in line.

This is a grotesque song making use of a specific sense of humour connected to the urban culture of Split. The relaxed and distanced tones contrast the claustrophobic and rather non-satirical state of affairs existing in Croatian public debate, whereby the left elites call the right-wing political programmes 'fascist' and the rightists depict the left-wing political programmes as being 'communist' and/or 'Yugoslavist'. This is a symbolic struggle over collective memory which, at times, triggers various value systems and allows for certain re-interpretations. However, neither fascism nor communism in the strictest sense, are bearing upon the political programmes in question. Croatian society as a whole, including its elites, is deeply polarized over the competing narratives of the Second World War which makes it difficult to distinguish the polemics from the real political programmes. Moreover, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s have been framed within the imagery of the Second World War and are therefore understood either as a continuation of that war, or as the same event conducted under new circumstances. In contemporary Croatia, past conflicts are blended into one another, thus intertwining the memories of communism, fascism and the recent Yugoslav wars.

Competing Narratives and Contested Symbols

The collective memory of the Second World War in Croatia is closely linked with memories from within the post-Yugoslav cultural and political space. Various acts of memorializing the war have enabled a demarcation between national lines (notably, Serbian/Croatian, Serbian/Bosnian, Croatian/Bosnian) as well as between ideological stances (left/right).

With respect to a national question, the most vivid uncertainties are centred around the role and nature of the Ustasha, their relationship with Nazi Germany and Italy (the extent to which they were independent in their politics or controlled by the Germans and/or Italians), and the role of the Home Guard members throughout the war (if they bear the same responsibility as the Ustasha for the war and subsequent war crimes). These issues point to the overall questions: who were the real fascists,^[1] who really started the war, who was more cruel, and who committed genocide? Moreover, there are discussions concerning the actual number of victims of the fascist and communist regimes, the nationality of the victims and perpetrators, and their alleged intentions.

The continuing struggle over the past is made evident through the naming of streets (some are named after Mile Budak), the naming of public spaces such as squares (that of Marshal Tito in Zagreb or the Square of the Victims of Fascism changed into the Square of the Croatian Great Man from 1990 to 2000) or the naming of monuments such as the Jure Francetić monument in Slunj. The struggle is also present

in historiography, school books and curricula, film and political discourse.

Politicians and activists of the Croatian Left advocate for the idea that the Croatian democratic state, established in 1990, has its roots in the Croatian anti-fascist tradition. In this narrative, anti-fascism and communism are taken as synonymous. This practice was used by the Yugoslav communists who, in turn, inherited a Soviet practice in defining social reality: all those who were not communists, or at least not associated with communists, were considered to be fascists, 'collaborators of Hitler' and 'domestic traitors'. In this way, the communist regime eliminated all possible opposition after the war, including that of the elites. The communist regime emerged not only as a result of a just and brave war against fascism (as it was idealistically presented), but was also built upon criminal activity. Currently, the left elite is in favour of only emphasizing the positive values of that period. In this narrative, nearly everything that symbolized the communist past is foregrounded (whether it is the red star, the figure of Marshal Tito or communist interpretations of history) and referred to not as 'communist' but as 'anti-fascist'. For the Left, Tito represents a real *l'homme d'état*. Although they admit that he made some mistakes, such as the introduction of a one-party system in place of a democracy, and the fact that he is responsible for committing crimes while seizing power in the post-war period, he is primarily depicted as the one who destroyed fascism and built a new Yugoslavia (which became a key international player). He is also portrayed as the one who brought liberty, broke with Stalin and built a just, peaceful and prosperous Yugoslavia; he created a 'third way', a new form of politics in the bipolar world (that of the non-allied countries). In the eyes of the Left, Tito's achievements outweigh his misdeeds.

In the narrative of Left, the communist movement, which is often referred to as anti-fascist, is understood as an embodiment of liberty and peace. In 2010, the leftist Croatian president Ivo Josipović, said: "Some of you are wearing partisan caps. They are beautiful caps, they bear messages of love and peace [and] messages to prevent crime, genocide and war. Croatia is a democratic country and there is anti-fascism inscribed in its Constitution [...] liberty and democracy were brought by the partisans"^[2]. The caps to which he refers had red stars – the symbols of communism – which for millions of people across the continent were symbols of terror. The president was fiercely attacked by right-wing politicians and activists afterwards, and subsequently modified his stance to a position condemning all totalitarian regimes. His predecessor Stjepan Mesić is, in turn, more explicit in glorifying communism. According to him, communism and fascism are not the same because "Nazi-fascism is a crime, both at the level of an idea and implementation, and to the end, whereas in the socialist regime [...] there were crimes, to be sure, yet, [they existed] not in the idea and its implementation but in the deviancy (u zastranjivanjima) which took place".^[3]

Although the leftists have modified their discourse with respect to Yugoslav communism (eventually admitting publicly the atrocities committed by the partisans), for them Tito is still a symbol of anti-fascism, liberty and modernity. Without communism, many believe that there would still be limited access to education with a high rate of illiteracy, no public health care and no railroad system. In this narrative, 'Titoist' communism is a symbol of a democratic Croatia. While they glorify the role of Tito, and represent themselves as the true defenders of his tradition, they condemn the new faces of fascism in Croatian public life. The discourses in question demonstrate that fascism is an 'umbrella term' under which various issues can be subsumed; it is not difficult to be called a fascist in Croatia.

On the other hand, there are elites in Croatia that overtly glorify the Ustasha. Anto Đapić, a politician enrolled with the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) since 1991, recently said, "if someone says that the Ustasha are criminals then he is saying that our parents were criminals. Whoever says that, is himself a criminal"^[4]. Ante Prkačin, when referring to the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), maintains that the

crimes committed by the Ustasha were a response to the crimes committed by the Serbs (towards the Croats), meaning that their acts of terror were only a defensive act. He admits that Hitler was a monster, but that he "granted Croats a space to create their own state". He says that "Hitler [enacted] evil [upon the] Slovenes, he [committed] an even greater evil [upon the] Serbs but he [did not harm the] Croats at that time; [the] person who [did us harm] was Josip Broz Tito"^[5]. Also, he said that if Croats had not created their own state in 1941, most of them – including army members and clergy – would have fled to the forest and become partisans. Both Đapić and Prkačin expressed these standpoints on Velimir Bujanec's TV show, himself a controversial and radical-right activist with a remarkable criminal record. The vast majority of members in the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP), a party which has fragmented into smaller parties and has gained very little support in the recent parliamentary elections, are in favour of commemorating the date when the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was established (10 April).

The Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) also opt for restoring the Ustasha slogan, 'For the homeland – ready!' as an official slogan of the Croatian Army, since some rightists maintain that this slogan is an old Croatian salutation (and hence has nothing to do with the Ustasha). The conservative historian Ivo Banac emphasizes that it was invented by Ante Pavelić himself.^[6] Banac's article was a critical response to a petition from August 2015 that was signed by over three thousand people including professional historians, academics, right-wing activists, journalists and a few Catholic priests (including two bishops) who were advocating for the restoration of the slogan as an official practice in the Croatian Army.

Banac was not the only one who voiced disapproval over the restoration of the slogan. Surprisingly, the petition was also rejected by two important right-wing politicians, namely, the president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and the head of the popular conservative party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Tomislav Karamarko. The president called it a 'provocation' that deserves no attention. Even though the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) is accused of nationalist or even fascist sympathies, their policy with respect to the past is rather ambivalent, a point to which I will return.

A New Minister, an Old Problem

In late 2015, the discussion about the Second World War was again brought into focus and intensified when Zlatko Hasanbegović, a historian, was named the new minister of culture in the Croatian government. Being that Hasanbegović is considered by the Left to be a historical revisionist who has brought into question the negative role of the Ustasha, this nomination provoked a heated public debate concerning the Second World War and Croatia's attitude towards its past. This event did not significantly change the ideologies of either the Left or the Right in Croatia, it is just a new episode in a long-lasting historical narrative.

The Hasanbegović case, however, became famous both in Croatia and abroad thanks to two petitions, one of which had both domestic and international signatories (altogether over 5000 writers, scholars and artists) including distinguished figures such as Alain Finkielkraut, Jack Lang and Pascal Bruckner. The aim of the petition – addressed to the Croatian Prime Minister – was to dismiss Hasanbegović from his function as minister stating that "he has no experience in the cultural sector and he publicly promotes extreme political views"^[7]. A second petition was drafted and signed in defence of Hasanbegović by professional Croatian historians. Ivo Banac, who criticized the first petition, emphasized that one of the signatories, Jack Lang, was the minister of culture and higher education under French president François Mitterrand, a person who was actively involved in the pro-Hitler puppet state of Vichy. Thus Banac was accusing Hasanbegović's critics of applying double standards.

Some of the objections to Hasanbegović's standpoints and engagements have been covered in Croatian public debate. Among these, were two in particular: first, a photograph of the minister in the 1990s was released where he is pictured wearing the cap of the HOS (Croatian Liberation Forces) – a military unit with ties to the Ustasha; and second, the minister's contribution in 1993 to a monthly magazine *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Independent State of Croatia) whereby he expressed positive attitudes toward the Ustasha members who had been killed, and referred to them as martyrs.^[8]

When this affair broke out, Hasanbegović denied his authorship (*nije autorski tekst*). When referring to the photograph, he said that the HOS (Croatian Liberation Forces) had been a part of the Croatian Army in the 1990s (a controversy concerning this militant group, which I will examine later on, was even mentioned by president Tuđman). In response to Hasanbegović's claims, the Serbian media who had published both the photograph and the article in Croatia ([Novosti](#)), claimed that the minister was lying.

In the following weeks and months after the affair broke out, minister Hasanbegović was investigated by the media with respect to his beliefs. His statements from the time take a clearly negative stance towards the Ustasha regime:

I have never been, in any way, apologetic with respect to any criminal regime, be it Ustasha or communist. On the contrary, I have been emphasizing in my public works and scientific activity that the Ustasha crimes carry not only the burden of defeat, but they also represent the biggest moral stumbling in the history of the Croatian nation. A moral stumbling whose shadow still extends over the Croatian nation. I am an opponent of totalitarianism, both fascist and communist; I am a member of a government and party which clearly sticks to the principles of democratic anti-fascism, anti-communism and anti-totalitarianism [...]. To selectively use entirely peripheral statements which were taken out of their context from more than 20 years ago during my adolescent and student period, represents the most basic political manipulation.^[9]

There are several linguistic strategies used in this text by Hasanbegović that should be elaborated upon. First, the minister criticizes not only the crimes themselves but also the regimes which caused them. Moreover, the term 'criminal regime' is defined explicitly as being both Ustasha and communist. Second, the word 'anti-fascism' being used here is supplied with the adjective 'democratic'. This emphasizes the existence of democratic and undemocratic anti-fascisms, and implies that the Croatian anti-fascism was not democratic but totalitarian. Third, although he does not clearly admit it, he implies that his activity as a young person could have been inappropriate when referring to his "peripheral statements [...] from more than 20 years ago during my adolescent and student period". The very fact that Hasanbegović feels the need to explain himself means that he finds it somewhat inappropriate to say that the Ustasha regime was something positive. This does not correspond with the far-right discourses like those of Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) members Đapić and Prkačin. Hasanbegović, as demonstrated above, has attempted to distance himself from the crimes of the Ustasha but not from the Croatian state that was ruled by the Ustasha. Moreover, he has downplayed the role of the Ustasha in history, while emphasizing the role of the communists and their crimes. This strategy, which has recently been used by the Right, is based not on the glorification of the Ustasha, but on the marginalization of them; while they are being foregrounded by the Left, the Right has pushed them into the background.

Places of Victimhood

The memory of the war is often conceptualized by referring to two symbolic places of victimhood or *lieux de memoire*: the Jasenovac Concentration Camp and the fields of Bleiburg. The former was a camp in which, during the Second World War, thousands of people were exterminated by the Ustasha. The latter was a place where communist-led partisans massacred thousands of people in 1945 for their alleged connections to the Croatian puppet state, the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH). There are ambiguities concerning the historical interpretations of these two places. With respect to Jasenovac, there are controversies regarding the national status of the victims: (Serbs consider themselves to be the most numerous victims, second only to the Jews, whereas some Croats emphasize that they were equal victims^[10]), and their numbers (Serbs claim their numbers to be between six hundred thousand and nearly one million killed, Croats claim one hundred thousand or less). Regarding the fields of Bleiburg, there are contested interpretations concerning the number of victims (the Left claim around ten thousand, while the Right maintain that there were a few hundred thousand people), their nationality (the Right says they were predominantly Croats while the Left share the opinion of the Serbs, who maintain the victims were multi-national), the intentions of the perpetrators (the Left says the partisans enacted revenge against the crimes committed by the fascists, while the Right claims it was done in order to eliminate potential enemies of the revolution), and finally the status of the victims (the Right often call the victims innocent, while some members of the Left state that they deserved it).

The Jasenovac camp and the fields of Bleiburg function as symbols of differing political positions. The former is commemorated by the Left, and the latter by the Right. According to the Left, the commemoration in Bleiburg by the Right is directed not towards the victims, but towards the regime that it symbolizes – the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). (The Social Democratic Party (SDP) politician Peđa Grbin said the commemorations in Bleiburg were not a memorial for victims but a memorial for the perished Independent State of Croatia). The Right, however, maintains that the Jasenovac commemorations are not devoted to "the commemoration of victims" but to "the rehabilitation of Yugoslav communism which is by itself criminal" (Zlatko Hasanbegović). Observably, both sides use nearly the same argumentation and identical rhetoric.

In communist Yugoslavia the "commemorations of Jasenovac and Bleiburg were illustrative of how a totalitarian political system monopolized the historical narrative through public rituals. Like all of the other ceremonies dedicated to [the Second World War], the commemoration at Jasenovac served to legitimate the ruling party, and any questioning of the official narrative or figures was strictly forbidden. Bleiburg, on the other hand, was a taboo topic that was systematically erased from the social memory in Yugoslavia, kept alive in the Croatian émigré, community and press"^[11].

Some Croats, mainly from the Right, claim that the Jasenovac camp was used by the communists and the Serbs to magnify Croatian culpability and responsibility for the war and the genocide, or even to stigmatize Croats as a 'genocidal nation'. The camp is indeed a place embedded with symbolic meaning, however for reasons unknown, Josip Broz Tito himself never officially visited the site. Bleiburg, on the other hand, was not commemorated in Yugoslavia; however, émigrés have been memorializing the site since 1947.

The question arises: to what extent are the two sites of wartime atrocities similar? In some respects, there are evident similarities: in both places, thousands of people were mercilessly and systematically eliminated by the two totalitarian regimes, yet, there is one difference: whilst the victims of Jasenovac bear no responsibility for the victims of Bleiburg (they were killed as a result of their religion, nationality or political affiliation), some of the people massacred in Bleiburg were directly or indirectly linked in what happened at Jasenovac. A portion of the population killed in Bleiburg were soldiers and employees of

the state, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), that both created and ruled the camp.

In contemporary Croatia, these two places symbolize the competing narratives at work. The first Croatian democratically elected president Franjo Tuđman, of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), decided to grant an official patronage to the Bleiburg commemoration in 1995. A few months later, while addressing the nation on 1 January 1996, Tuđman expressed the idea that Jasenovac should become a place where all the Croatian victims of war could be commemorated. This would, according to him, "warn the Croatian people that in the past they were divided and brought into an internecine conflict; warn them to not repeat it, and to reconcile the dead just as we reconciled the living, their children and their grandchildren"^[12]. The idea of 'mixing bones' (of both Croat partisans and Ustasha) provoked critique since, as many argued, this could change interpretations about the war: Croats were no longer perpetrators of crimes but instead became mere victims. The concept of reconciliation was not realized, however, and both Jasenovac and Bleiburg continued to be conflicted lieux de memoire.

Tuđman never visited Jasenovac, nor Bleiburg, and thus he paradoxically followed in Tito's footsteps. The first prominent politician to officially visit Jasenovac was his adversary, the post-communist prime minister, Ivica Račan (Social Democratic Party, SDP) in 2002. A few weeks later, Račan also visited Bleiburg. After seizing power in 2003, a newly formed Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) with Ivo Sanader as prime minister, carried out a practice that is less about reconciliation and more about keeping the balance; satisfying both the Left and the Right at the same time. On the one hand, the government donated respectable financial support for the commemorations in Bleiburg, and on the other it supported renovations of the monument and the creation of a modern museum in Jasenovac.^[13]

In 2012, the newly elected left government withdrew financial support for the commemorations in Bleiburg, but in 2015 the newly elected conservative party reintroduced it again. In the same year, the Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović from the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), continued a well-established practice: she attended neither the official commemorations of Bleiburg nor of Jasenovac. Instead, she visited the two places in private. The Left condemned her actions by maintaining that the president considered the two sites equal, yet according to leftist politicians, they are not the same (a few years earlier, Slavko and Ivo Goldstein wrote a book titled, *Jasenovac and Bleiburg Are Not the Same*). The practice of attempting to satisfy both sides simultaneously appears to be a new strategy by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) to deal with the past; it is partly derived from Tuđman's practice, and partly from Sanader's. This syncretism entails an attempt to minimize the influence of the Left and of the radical Right.

Tuđman's Legacy: Ambivalence, Reconciliation and the Third Way

President Tuđman, the charismatic founder and head of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), was often condemned by his opponents, in particular the Left and the Serbs, for allegedly attempting to rehabilitate the Croatian Democratic Union (NDH). Apart from being influenced by some émigrés that were cultivating an apologetic stance towards the Ustasha movement, some of his statements were interpreted as fascist. The most relevant claim being that the Croatian Democratic Union (NDH) was not only a 'puppet state based on fascist crimes', but was also an expression of the Croatian nation aspiring to have its own state. Yet, Tuđman's stance towards the past is more ambivalent than is claimed by the Left. This is what he said about Tito:

Tito, undoubtedly, was one of Europe's most important l'homme d'état in the period after the

Second World War. He was a communist, and a Marxist, but he was at the same time a very pragmatic politician, and he wanted to achieve equality for the Croatian nation in Yugoslavia [...]. As far as Tito's merits for the Croatian nation are concerned, he brought, together with the anti-fascist movement, the Croatian nation onto the side of the victorious and democratic forces of the anti-fascist coalition which, in turn, enabled the creation of the federal Croatian state. His merits in international politics are that he, as I said, resisted Stalin in a moment when the Western powers were nearly helpless with respect to the strong communist bloc, the Soviet bloc, and also with respect to the spread of communism in the whole world.^[14]

Tuđman, thus nationalized the role of Tito in Croatian history as well as emphasized the 'Croatian-ness' of the communist partisans. Tuđman, who was once a partisan and a prominent communist, could not have been a more fierce apologist for the fascists he once struggled against. There is another issue that might serve as evidence in proving that Tuđman's stance was ambivalent. Once, in an interview, when asked why he was not an advocate of the inclusion of the troops of the Croatian Liberation Forces (HOS) into the Croatian Army, he answered that the Croatian Liberation Forces, or "black shirts" (crnokošuljaši) as he called them, were against the Western values to which Croatia was aspiring. In this way, Tuđman was, at least in some instances, minimizing the role of the positive recapitulations of the Ustasha movement. At the same time, some of his closest companions were, on the contrary, publicly advocating a positive evaluation of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

According to Tuđman, the biggest obstacle against communism was not that it was a totalitarian system that disregarded individual rights, but that it was allegedly anti-Croatian. As a result, his main concern was not the individual victims of the communist regime but its collective victim: Croatia. In Tuđman's discourse, anti-Yugoslavism is more important than anti-communism. In order to accomplish Croatia's road to independence, he wanted to find a way to make former opponents from the Left and from the Right agree with each other. The concept of the 'reconciliation of partisans and fascists' – a construction which addresses collective figures of national fate – was not only verbalized and popularized by Tuđman but also by other former communists, such as his successor, Stjepan Mesić. Nowadays, the two ex-presidents are taken as political and ideological antipodes. The former is a hero of the Right, whereas the latter is an important point of reference for the Left. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, when various ideological stances merged in order to realize Croatian independence, they seemed to have opted for the same political programme (with Mesić referring positively to the Independent State of Croatia).

Such a 'reconciliation' was a consequence of the existence of cultural codes that emerged much earlier within Croatian culture. These codes were expressed by the State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia (ZAHVOH), and in particular, by the Croatian communist elite of the so-called 'Croatian Spring' in 1971.^[15]

This idea is especially visible in Croatian literature. Literature, thanks to its fictional and polyphonic nature, had the privilege of conceptualizing the war and its actors in new forms; it shone a new light on some of the aspects of war. It is no accident that in many of the novels written between 1945–1990, where the Second World War was conceptualized, the most recognizable hero is not a militant partisan fiercely struggling against the occupiers and domestic traitors, but is instead a character who is weak, indecisive and prone to confronting himself with intellectual contradictions. Characters like this were 'torn between' two worlds, just as in the novel *Razapet izmedju* (Torn Between) written by Ivan Kušan in 1958. The protagonist in Kušan's novel, a typical Croatian man of the twentieth century lacks subjectivity

and is searching for it. He is a weak intellectual struggling within himself rather than fighting, as partisan heroes usually do. A similar figure has also been represented in books written by Vjekoslav Kaleb, Čedo Prica, Ivan Supek, Krsto Špoljar, Ranko Marinković, and after the fall of Yugoslavia, Mirko Sabolović. Unlike the Serbs, the Croats are represented as being unable to act consciously because everything was predetermined by those in power. Croats, thus, are presented as people with no subjective role in the war; they were thrown into the war and left to bleed. This topos is well established in the Croatian literary tradition. It refers back to the most important Croatian writer and intellectual figure of the twentieth century, Miroslav Krleža, who created a pacifistic concept of the First World War in the book *Croatian God Mars* (1922). In the book, a peasant from the region of Zagorje, was forcefully enlisted by the Habsburg reactionary regime and sent to the Galitian front (notably, both Tito and Tuđman were from Zagorje and knew, directly or indirectly, what the Galitian experience was). The peasant did not know who he was fighting for or why.

His ambivalence can be seen as a metaphor for the Croatian fate. In this imagery 'two Croatias' emerged: the fascist and the communist, yet the Croatian everyman is depicted neither as a real fascist nor as communist. Just like the peasant from Zagorje, he does not understand what is happening and is unable to act. In this vision, Croats are seen not as the perpetrators of crime, but as victims of it; whether they are Ustasha, or communists, they bear no responsibility for crimes against anybody. In turbulent circumstances they fought the best they could, for the same aim: that of an independent Croatia. This frame made it possible to create a space for reconciliation of all Croatian people. Tuđman's goal was "to place the crimes of the Ustasha and the communists on equal ground"^[16]. This vision of history is also represented in contemporary popular historiography (see: Dušan Bilandžić, Dragutin Pavličević) and in the film 'Long Dark Night' by Antun Vrdoljak.

Although Hasanbegović subscribes somewhat to Tuđman's ideas, he is criticized not only by the Left but also by Jadranka Kosor, the former Prime Minister from the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). She recently said that the election of Hasanbegović had been a violation of the politics of Tuđman.^[17]

Even though the Second World War ended over 70 years ago, the dichotomies inherent in the act of remembering the conflict still stigmatizes people as either communist or fascist. Moreover, Croatian politicians from both the Left and the Right reproduce an atmosphere of permanent struggle. Commemorating the past serves not only as a means to remember victims but it also maintains a certain system of values. Yet, the introduction of a 'third way' that is unable to neutralize the conflict of the Left and the Right, is the consequence of a very real problem. If a culture bears upon the interpretations of past events, then Croats must confront themselves with the existence of 'two Croatias', but both of them can hardly be perceived as positive. Both the Ustasha and the communist regimes were totalitarian and undemocratic, and both bear the responsibility for many crimes. Alternatively, the 'third way' provides an antidote to the glorifications made by both the Left and the Right regarding the regimes in question; yet, this antidote inevitably results in an ambivalence that is always subject to critical evaluation.

Footnotes

1. When the symbol of a swastika was discovered in the stadium of Hajduk Split in 2015, a discussion broke out regarding whether the Ustasha were fascists or not. Denis Kuljiš claimed that they were not, whereas one historian Goran Miljan responded critically to that statement (cf. Denis Kuljiš, Ustaški pokret Ante Pavelića bio je udaljen od fašizma koliko su klape daleko od opere, *Jutarnji list* (21 June 2015), retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/analiza-denisa-kuljisa-ustaski-pokret-ante-pavelica-bio-je-udaljen-od-fasizma-koliko-su-klape-daleko-od-opere/397579/>; Goran Miljan, Kad povjesničari ne žele, a novinari ne razumiju: komentar poljudske svatsike, povika Za dom spremni i članka Denisa Kuljiša, *Historijski zbornik* 1 (2015): 195–200.
2. Ivo Josipović, Partizanske kape su lijepe, one su poruke ljubavi i mira, *Slobodna Dalmacija* (27 July 2010), retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Hrvatska/tabid/66/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/110870/Default.aspx>
3. Stjepan Mesić, Interview in "Nedjeljom u 2. HRT" (5 June 2016), retrieved 15 September 2016, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJDOWT-QyHo>
4. Anto Đapić, Ako ustaša znači voljeti svoju domovinu, braniti je i dati sve za nju, onda pristajem biti ustaša, desno (18 March 2016), retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <http://www.desno.info/?p=2166>
5. Ante Prkačin, Interview in "Bujica" (30 January 2015), retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7ZaDQ74pKY>
6. Ivo Banac, Interview in "Bujica" (7 March 2016), retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxlG9wdzh-I>
7. A public appeal to the government of the Republic of Croatia for the dismissal of the Minister of Culture Zlatko Hasanbegović, *Kulturnjaci* 2016, retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <http://www.kulturnjaci2016.org/sample-page/a-public-appeal-to-the-government-of-the-republic-of-croatia/>
8. Hrvoje Šimičević, Zlatko Hasanbegović: Ustashas are heroes, martyrs and shaheeds, *Novosti* (13 February 2016), retrieved 12 September 2016, URL: <http://www.portalnovosti.com/hasanbegovic-ustashas-are-heroes-martyrs-and-shaheeds>
9. Fotogalerija: Točka na U, *Novosti* (13 February 2016), retrieved 12 September 2016, URL: <http://www.portalnovosti.com/fotogalerija-tocka-na-u>
10. Recently there was a documentary film shot by Jakov Sedlar titled 'Jasenovac – the Truth' (2015). In the film, the genocide committed in the camp is minimized and the responsibility attributed to the Ustasha is omitted, whereas the activity of the communists after the war is labeled as genocide against the Croats.
11. Vjeran Pavlaković, *Red Stars, Black Shirts: Symbols, Commemorations, and Contested Histories of World War Two in Croatia*, Seattle, 2008.
12. Pavlaković, p. 27.
13. There were some interpretations of this exhibition stating that it was mostly focused on the Holocaust and had left aside the largest group of victims, the Serbian population, see: Ljiljana Radonić, Croatia: Exhibiting Memory and History at the "Shores of Europe", *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 3 (2011): 355–367; Ana Kršinić Lozica, Između memorije i zaborava: Jasenovac kao dvostruko posredovana trauma, *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 35 (2011): 297–308.
14. "Tudjman", directed by Jakov Sedlar (screenplay: Hrvoje Hitrec), 2008.
15. Maciej Czerwiński, Novogovor: Retorika hrvatskih komunista, in: *Riječki filološki dani*, edited by Nikolina Palašić and Lada Badurina, Rijeka, 2015, pp. 55–69; Maciej Czerwiński, Socjalistyczny w formie, narodowy w treści: Chorwacka odmiana komunistycznej nowomowy w czasie tzw. chorwackiej wiosny, *Stylistyka* 21 (2012): 77–98; Maciej Czerwiński, Breme (post)komunizma: Hrvatski i poljski kulturni kodovi, in: *Komparativni postsocijalizam: slavenska iskustva*, edited by Maša Kolanović, Zagreb: Zagrebačka slavistička škola, 2013, pp. 47–80.
16. Stevo Đurašković, National identity-building and the "Ustaša-nostalgia", *Croatia: the past that will not pass*, *Nationalities Papers* 44 (2016): 1–16, here: 7.
17. Jadranka Kosor and Lansiranje Hasanbegovića, HDZ Se odrekao Tuđmanove politike, *tportal* (29 May 2016), retrieved 10 September 2016, URL: <http://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/430373/Lansiranje-Hasanbegovica-HDZ-se-odrekao-Tudmanove-politike.html>



The Flower Monument in Jasenovac

Author: Bogdan Bogdanović, Source: <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=7158>, Ownership: Jasenovac Memorial Site



Zlatko Hasanbegović 2016

Author: Toni Bitunjac, source: <https://vlada.gov.hr/clanovi-vlade/66>