

Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (eds.):
*Twenty Years after Communism:
The Politics of Memory and
Commemoration*
Oxford 2014: Oxford University Press,
326 pp.

The literature on memory politics is already rich. Since the classic works by authors such as Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, there have been several academic contributions dealing specifically with public memorialisation or commemorations. But the political science perspective has been mostly absent from these works, which have approached the commemorations from a sociological and anthropological standpoint. This volume deals with commemorations and memory politics within a well-founded theoretical framework. It is focused on one single event: the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the 1989 and 1991 events, marking the fall of the communist bloc. Among the works that focus on experiences with official commemorations, this book is perhaps the first one to systematically and theoretically treat them from the perspective of memory politics, that is, the specific political use of public celebrations of commemoration.

The editors have gathered a pool of experts on post-communist countries to deliver us this excellent compilation of case studies on seventeen countries enabling them to empirically test their theoretical framework for understanding memory politics and its role in political life. The criterion for the selection of the countries was the existence of a 'minimal level of democracy, because memory politics would differ in democratic and authoritarian regimes, based on the autonomy of actors and level of control over freedom of expression' (p. 2). For this reason Russia is not included in the book, but Ukraine is. The focus is on how the fall of socialism/communism was officially commemorated at events designed by governments and political parties.

The first chapter establishes a theoretical framework and develops a model based on two main concepts: mnemonic actors, and the memory regimes resulting from their interaction. They identify four types of mnemonic actors: warriors, pluralists, abnegators, and prospectives. Mnemonic warriors create exclusive narratives and do not recognise contesting memories. Their version or their 'truth' is incontestable and non-negotiable. At the other extreme, mnemonic pluralists are those who allow for and respect different visions of the past. There are also mnemonic abnegators, who are either simply uninterested in memory politics or set it aside because they could be held responsible for the past events. The last type are mnemonic prospectives, a category not well described and whose analytical utility is difficult to understand because the authors cannot find any actor of this kind in the post-communist countries. All these actors behave under the influence of three factors: structural constraints, cultural constraints, and cultural strategies.

According to this typology and the interaction between the actors, the authors describe three types of memory regimes: fractured memory regimes (with at least one mnemonic warrior) and two kinds of non-fractured memory regimes—pillarised memory regimes, which allow for the coexistence of different memories, and unified memory regimes, consisting of abnegators. According to the case studies, most post-communist countries are either fractured or unified memory regimes.

The theoretical framework is followed by case studies of seventeen countries conducted with a remarkably homogeneous methodology. With such systematisation, the cases are divided according to memory-regime type. Nine countries fit into the category of fractured memory regimes (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Baltic countries, Ukraine, and Slovenia). Seven countries belong to the category of unified memory regimes (Germany, Bulgaria, and the five countries of the former Yugoslavia,

minus Slovenia). Only one case can fall into the category of pillarised memory regime—the Czech Republic, whose political elites are abnegators, but allow for the alternative or contesting memories offered by civil society. Each case study follows the same pattern. It begins with a short summary of the event(s) in 1989 or 1991 (the subject of commemoration), which is followed by an analysis of the commemoration held twenty years later and the politics of commemoration. This methodology enables a comparative analysis in the concluding chapter. Each case study (whether single-country or a group of countries, such as the Baltic states and the former Yugoslav countries) provides an excellent review of the events that eventually led to the democratisation and/or independence of these states at crucial moments in the fall of communism.

The case study chapters describe and analyse commemorations of not only 1989 or 1991 but also of some key moments of the earlier history that were crucial for some nations and which have remained objects of different historical interpretations: 1956 for Hungary, the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact for the Baltic states, World War II and the period of the common communist state for the former Yugoslavia. These moments tend to overshadow the momentum of the fall of communism because they were not dealt with at the right moment and were kept as collective traumas.

The concluding part offers a broad overview of the case studies and analyses the influence of several factors on the memory-regime outcomes: the nature of state socialism before 1989; the mode of extrication from state socialism; the cleavages structure at the time of commemoration (left-right, ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.); the features of the communist successor party; the existence and intensity of memory layering during commemoration and its nature.

A slight majority of cases (nine out of

seventeen) classified as fractured memory regimes count as prominent mnemonic warriors. Leaving aside Ukraine, which is characterised as a unique case, the remaining eight countries are classified into two groups. The first one, which includes, Poland, Hungary, and Slovenia, features reformed communism, negotiated extrication, a strong ex-communist social democratic party, and a strong left-right cleavage. In the second group we find Romania, Slovakia, and the Baltic states, which had no tradition of reform under communist rule and have strong ideological or socio-cultural cleavages. The authors conclude that powerful cleavages promote the fracturing of memory regimes.

Seven countries belong to the category of unified memory regimes: Bulgaria, Germany and five of the six former Yugoslav republics. Although the editors offer various explanations and attempt to establish the patterns regarding the five former Yugoslav countries, they miss the point of unified abnegation towards the 1989 events. As the author of the chapter dedicated to the former Yugoslav countries, Aida Hozić, observes in the title of the chapter, for the former Yugoslav countries 'it (1989) happened elsewhere'. The year that symbolises unification for Europe marks the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the start of conflicts in the region (p. 233). This breakaway explains why in most of these countries (except Slovenia) there is a unified memory regime (or complete disregarding) towards the events of 1989, while on other issues, regarding World War II, the communist era, or the wars of the 1990s, the memory regimes in each of the countries are extremely fractured. The former Yugoslav countries did not consider themselves part of the Soviet bloc, be it politically, internationally, historically, or socially. The former Yugoslav countries had more than enough of their own contested memories to bother coming to terms with 'communism', something that they did not really consider their own past experience.

Contrary to what the editors argue, ex-Yugoslav political actors did not decide 'let's not go there' (p. 282, referred to the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of 1989) because they were abnegators, but because 1989 meant nothing to them. Due to this specificity, former Yugoslavia is usually put aside in all kind of analyses devoted to memory policies in post-communist countries.

As said, only one case study qualifies for the category of pillarised memory regime: the Czech Republic. Here, different memories are accepted and institutionalised, and political elites accepted the civil society's alternative commemoration of 1989. As Bernhard and Kubik rightly observe regarding pillarised regimes, it 'does not seem like the sort of arrangement that comes together in the short term' (p. 269). Regardless of the memory regime and typology of actors, the authors offer interesting and suggestive interpretations of the events of commemoration in 2009, making reference to the effect of country-specific and purely idiosyncratic cultural features, such as the Švejkian vision of Czech national identity.

Finally, an important contribution to the analysis of democratic consolidation is the relationship the editors establish between the type of mnemonic regime and the stability of democracy. In fractured memory regimes, where mnemonic warriors choose the strategy of delegitimising the competitors through historical lenses, this scheme represents a potential threat to new democracies as it takes the political debate away from interests and values and results and programmes and focuses on blaming identities. Authors also suggest that fractured memory regimes are found in weakly institutionalised party systems, while, on the contrary, pillarised regimes are a feature of consolidated party systems. This relationship between the weakness or stability of party systems and the given memory regime is thought-provoking and would need further empiric testing. One of

the book's greatest strengths is its contribution to a well-founded theoretical framework of memory politics in post-communist countries, deduced from an insightful cross-country analysis of how these countries commemorated the key events of their recent history. The case study chapters in turn offer valuable input to democratisation studies and to the broader field of research on political life in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Jelena Čvorović: *The Roma: A Balkan Underclass*

London 2014: Ulster Institute for Social Research, 254 pp.

This book seeks to explain differences in the demography of the Roma in terms of their higher fertility and low life expectancy compared to majority populations. The book provides an illuminating and contextually rich description of the histories of Roma people within Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans and of the social and political conditions affecting these groups. However, somewhat paradoxically in light of the author's recognition that Roma are a 'shunned and categorised minority' (p. 23), the book itself makes a number of unsettling and often unfounded essentialist claims about Roma people.

The opening sentence to the book states that human behaviour is 'best understood as being a part of a life-history—a suite of traits genetically organised to meet the trials of life—survival, growth, reproduction' (p. 1), aligning the work with the theoretical perspectives of J. Philippe Rushton. In accordance with this tradition,