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# Introduction Volume 9

**KAS SWERTS**

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The small Estonian city of Narva recently caught the attention of the international press. As the conflict in Ukraine rages on, Estonian authorities decided to remove a Soviet-era tank that was put on a pedestal. The Estonian government described how these Soviet-related monuments – in the wake of the recent conflict – 'opened wounds in our society'.[1]

The removal of the tank should not come as a surprise: as (geo)political conflicts or disturbances arise, the role of monuments (and their place in the public space) is being reconsidered, often leading to their reinterpretation, removal, or even destruction. Why do monuments figure so prominently in these discussions, and what does their removal or reinterpretation tell us of specific historical or socio-political contexts?

These were some of the questions being asked during the (online) NISE conference *National forgetting and memory: the destruction of 'national' monuments from a comparative perspective* in March 2021. The articles in this volume all stem from the conference and address a wide range of topics related to the removal or reinterpretation of monuments (and public spaces) in cases ranging from Europe to North America. The articles highlight the complex interplay monuments have with wider historical and socio-political contexts, and how throughout history debates have been waged on monuments and their role in the public

sphere. In addition to the articles published in this volume and the next, the lectures presented during the conference can also be consulted online at https://vimeo.com/nisenationalmovements.

Starting from the next volume, *Studies on national Movements* will also include a new section on 'Digital Humanities'. The section will pay attention to different projects related to the study of nationalism and national movements in different cases and time periods, highlighting the beneficial role digital tools can play in our understanding of nationalism and national movements, and further inducing possible comparative or transnational research.

Finally, NISE has recently seen a change of personnel, as administrator Hanno Brand will move on to new endeavours. As NISE's new administrator, I want to once again thank Hanno for all his work, and hope that I can do as good a job as he has done throughout these last years.

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/16/estonia-removes-soviet-era-tank-monument-amid-russia-tensions-narva

# Toxic Monuments and Mnemonic Regime Change

**ANN RIGNEY**

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This article takes as its point of departure the recent wave of contestations relating to colonial-era monuments in Europe. While the toppling of monuments has long been a part of political regime change, recent attacks on monuments need to be understood instead, not as celebrations of a change that has already occurred, but as attempts to affect 'mnemonic regime change' as part of a larger struggle for racial equality and social justice. Monuments are materialisations of larger narratives that operate within a broader culture of memory; at the same time, they have a particular role to play in mnemonic contestations since they offer a physical platform for public performances of adherence to, or dissent from, dominant understandings of collective identity and memory. Using insights from the field of cultural memory studies, this article illustrates these dynamics with detailed reference to the controversy around the Edward Colston statue in Bristol. It argues that its dramatic toppling in June 2020 was part of a much longer and slower two-track process whereby the narrative underpinning Colston was undermined and an alternative narrative of Bristol's complicity in the slave trade was unforgotten. It concludes by reflecting on the importance but also the limits of memory activism focussed on statues.

**Keywords:** cultural memory, counter-memory, iconoclasm, memory-activism nexus, Edward Colston.

In recent years, monuments relating to the legacy of European colonialism have been the subject of very visible public controversies across the world. Starting with the highly mediatized "Rhodes must Fall" movement in South Africa in 2015, multiple 'must fall' movements have been targeting public expressions of the historical domination of Europeans over brown and black people. To date more than 190 statues to the Confederacy have been removed across the United States (94 of them following the murder of George Floyd in 2020).[1] In Mexico City, as in many other locations across Latin America, the statue to Christopher Columbus has been removed after protest by indigenous activists.[2] In Canada, a monument to Queen Victoria was upended in Winnipeg as one among many attacks on symbols of the oppression of indigenous peoples.[3] In Belgium, King Leopold II's bust was removed from a park in Ghent in June 2020, while his statue in Brussels has become a site of regular demonstrations for greater racial equality in Belgium.


**Figure 1:** Vandalized Monument to King Leopold II, Ghent, Belgium, 2 June 2020. Photo: Wannes Nimmegeers. ID/Photoagency.

Last but not least, the dramatic image of slave-trader Edward Colston being toppled into Bristol harbour hit the international headlines in June

2020.[4] Seeing the often-cheerful faces of the crowds on these occasions there is no denying that monuments matter a lot – perhaps never more so than when they are being literally and figuratively taken down from their pedestals. As the confused public debates indicate, however, many people are struggling to understand why monuments evoke such anger and why their destruction might be more than the mindless spoiling of material heritage. The present article aims to provide some answers.

It starts by noting that there is nothing new about iconoclasm. Surprising as it may seem given their reputation for durability, monuments are in fact routinely subject to being relocated, demolished, and reworked into new objects.

**Figure 2:** A mob pulls down a gilded lead equestrian statue of George III at Bowling Green, New York City, 9 July 1776. Painting William Walcutt, 1854. Wikimedia Commons.

Historical examples lead from the *damnatio memoriae* tradition of the Romans, to the destruction of the statue of George III in New York in

1776, to attacks on icons related to the ancien regime during the French Revolution (for which the Abbé Grégoire coined the term 'vandalism'), to the wave of Lenin removals that cascaded across post-Communist Europe after 1989, to the highly orchestrated and mediated toppling of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2003.[5] Particularly relevant to the case at hand, albeit less well-known, was the wave of monument removals that accompanied decolonization.[6] These included the destruction of the statue to Jan Pieterszoon Coen (director general of the Dutch East India Company) in Jakarta in 1943, the relocation of Queen Victoria from post-independent Ireland to Sydney, and the 'repatriation' of various statues of Joan of Arc from Algeria. Recent research has shown that colonial statues were repatriated to save them from being beheaded, destroyed, or otherwise desecrated at the hands of the newly independent peoples.[7] Of course, one could also ask what Joan of Arc was doing in Algiers in the first place or Luís de Camões in Macau. Their presence outside of the metropole is testimony to the fact that colonialism meant settling both people and memories in occupied territories (I've referred to this elsewhere as 'memorial colonization').[8] The toppling of colonial statues to mark independence had its own dynamic, but it too fits into a long-standing association between monument-building and the exercise of power, and between monument removal and political change.

Current debates about colonial-era statues thus stand in a longer tradition. It should be noted nevertheless that recent attacks on colonial statues have not typically been the by-product of *political* regime change on a par with the fall of Communism or Algerian Independence. Instead, recent iconoclasm has arguably aimed for *mnemonic* change within civil society. It is not in the first instance about overthrowing a government or celebrating the fact that one has been overthrown, but about engineering a change in the collective narrative and, indirectly, of social relations in the present. In what follows I refer in this regard to 'mnemonic regime change': concerted efforts on the part of memory

activists to effect a sea-change in the memorial landscape, in this case, by bringing memory into play as part of an ongoing struggle against racism and inequality.[9] As a result, the decommissioning of monuments, the taking away of their power to command respect, can be seen by stakeholders both as an end in itself and as a means towards a larger goal.[10] As we will see, this makes the contestation of statues structurally ambivalent.

Suffice it here to note that challenging the power of colonial era monuments to dominate public space is part of a multi-layered struggle and not just a reflection of random aggression towards heritage objects. Studying its dynamics can add to our understanding of the memory-activism nexus and the ways in which remembering the past and contesting the present can work together.[11] It is already clear that iconoclasm is not construed here in merely negative terms (as destruction), but also in a positive way (as a resource for effecting change). This approach takes its cue from a recent study of commemorative practices in ancient Rome which argues that the obliteration of the memory of fallen tyrants was also a creative process in that it allowed the new ruler to profile his own role in the downfall of his predecessor.[12] How do the current attacks on monuments help in the transition to a new narrative and, linked to this, to social transformation? In what follows I attempt to answer this question using the conceptual tools of cultural memory studies and with specific reference to the case of Edward Colston. Where monuments have tended to be discussed both in the literature and in the media as autonomous phenomena, cultural memory studies offers a more holistic approach that situates both the erection and contestation of monuments within a larger dynamic.

## The Dynamics of Cultural Memory

The interdisciplinary field of cultural memory studies takes as one of its central concerns the interplay between stories (narratives about a shared past) and collective identities (a sense of belonging together as a family, city, nation, region, and so on). In contrast to the related term 'heritage', which has traditionally been used to refer to a fixed and often material legacy, the term memory refers by definition to something dynamic. Cultural memory, as Astrid Erll defines it, refers to 'all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in socio-cultural contexts.'[13] Being always a work in progress, cultural memory is continuously subject to revision thanks to the existence of a feedback loop between storytelling and changing 'social frameworks', to use the influential term coined by Maurice Halbwachs.[14] Collective narratives are periodically adapted, albeit often under duress, to fit the needs of a changing present. This can occur after major historical events, but also in response to the demands of hitherto marginalized groups who, as they become more vocal, also demand better representation in 'our' narrative. For this reason, as I have argued elsewhere, memory studies should be concerned not only with how stories are preserved, but with how dominant narratives change over time and how that change is negotiated.[15] Understanding what Cardina and Rodrigues have recently called 'mnemonic transitions' has become all the more urgent at a time of increasing global entanglements which put pressure on established national narratives and their purported representativity.[16]

In explaining how collective narratives change, it is useful to recall that remembering and forgetting always go hand in glove. Not only because memory needs to be selective to be meaningful, but also because the sense of a shared past and shared present can only be created if people

are prepared to paper over historical cracks. As Ernest Renan famously wrote:

> The essence of a nation is that its members have many things in common, but also that they have forgotten many things. […] every French citizen has to have forgotten the Saint-Bartholomew and the thirteenth-century massacres in the south of France.[17]

As this passage makes clear, forgetting is not merely a negative condition. Seen in positive terms, it makes possible solidarities in the present by occluding those conflicts whose memory could be divisive. This is easier said than done in a practical sense, of course, and it is also fraught with huge ethical problems. Ordering someone to forget – forget the Saint Barthélemy, don't talk about the war – is itself a reminder. Moreover, it risks imposing a false and unsustainable unity on the past by erasing injustices which, from the perspective of their victims, should be collectively remembered and their perpetrators called to account.

Considerations like these have led memory scholars to identify different types of forgetting as the structural counterpart of remembrance. Notable here is the distinction made by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur between active and passive forgetting.[18] As the term suggests, active forgetting occurs when repressive regimes erase records or occlude a story that was once known but that is now hidden from sight; or when post-conflict societies agree to a 'pact of forgetting' as occurred in England in the seventeenth century and in Spain in the post-Franco transition.[19] Passive forgetting, in contrast, can best be described as forgetting by default. These are the things forgotten because they are considered unimportant or, more insidiously, because they are simply invisible. They are the unknown unknowns. The term 'aphasia' has been used to capture this condition as it affects the memory of colonialism. Defined by Ann Laura Stoler, aphasia is an inability to make sense of evidence relating to colonial violence and connect it to the dominant

narratives that have hitherto shaped European identities.[20] As a result of such aphasia, huge swathes of history have been forgotten in the commemorative arts, not because their traces were actively occluded (though this too can happen) but because people, as Stoler puts it, were not even aware that these 'disabled histories' ever occurred or that the people affected ever existed. Since they did not fit into the 'systems of relevance' defining what was important, they were simply un-memorable.[21] So what makes change possible and how does un-forgetting occur?

Historical research has shown that societies become periodically aware that things have been left out of received views of the collective past (a case in point is the newly 'recovered' memory of the participation of colonial troops in World War 1).[22] This transformation of the collective memoryscape can be referred to as *counter*-memory, in the double sense that it gives public expression to an hitherto occluded story and challenges the authority of dominant narratives.[23] Countering is by definition relational. As I have argued elsewhere and will argue further here, stories emerge in dialogue with the ones already in circulation as part of an ongoing dialectic.[24] This means that counter-memory is as much about undermining the power of the old narrative as it is about proposing a new one. Indeed, the new is often modelled on the one it replaces (a case in point is offered by the recent substitution of the statue of an indigenous woman in Mexico City for one of Columbus).[25]

The dynamics of contestation are linked to what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called the 'coming into appearance' of hitherto marginalized and overlooked groups.[26] Debates about public commemoration – who and what should be publicly commemorated? – are deeply entangled with social, political and economic mechanisms of exclusion. In recent years, the contestation of dominant narratives has gravitated towards monuments – for reasons that will be set out below – but cultural memory studies has taught us that monuments never stand alone; that

collective narratives are never dependent on just a single medium either for their emergence or for their demise. They are mediated and remediated, repeated and adapted, and recalled both in shorthand and in longhand, as they move across different media and platforms: texts, images, museums, performances, music, and monuments.[27] Crucially, memory is never just located at any one of these sites but gains traction in society by dint of being repeated with variations across these different cultural forms and practices. It is only thanks to the operation of 'plurimedial networks' that narratives find public uptake and remain in circulation.[28]

Recognizing the multimedial character of memory provides an important corrective to the tendency in recent public debates to treat monuments as if they were isolated phenomena whose toppling could effect radical change in the world – be that for better or, as the defenders of the monuments imply, for worse. That being said, it is clear that monuments do have some distinctive features that need to be explained if we are to understand their power and the hopes and fears vested in them.

## How Monuments Matter

Academic studies of public monuments have by and large taken an historical approach and traced their changing aesthetics within specific contexts.[29] Theoretical reflections have mainly consisted of critiques of monumentalism as a totalizing and monologic mode of remembrance.[30] While critical reflection on future alternatives remains crucial, it is also time for a more fundamental theoretical reflection on the nature of monuments as a cultural medium. Is it possible to generalize about the way statues and other sculptural works operate as carriers of memory? How do they generate meaning and trigger affect? In what follows, I

show that monuments can be reduced neither to their referent (the person or event they depict) nor to their aesthetic form (their character as works of art). Building on insights from actor-network theory,[31] I propose instead to view monuments as actants in shifting assemblages that bring together material objects, narratives, locations, and human actors in changing constellations.[32] Three aspects of the monument-as-assemblage deserve special attention here.

Firstly, *monuments evoke narratives.* Where other media, such as text or film, can present an individual's life in a detailed way, monuments by and large give a condensed or shorthand version of a story that has been told in more detail elsewhere. They can thus be seen as nodal points in a plurimedial network, their meaning in part dependent on other media of remembrance with which they resonate. At the same time, they also *add* something distinctive to cultural memory by giving events or historical figures a singular material shape. Just as there is a history of textual genres, so too is there a history of monumental forms, a plastic language of commemoration that has changed over time. Two columns erected in 1806 and 1808 respectively illustrate this principle: although the column to Napoleon in the Place Vendôme in Paris and the column to Nelson in Dublin were dedicated to arch enemies, they both took the form of a military leader standing on a classical column. There was apparently a shared language of commemoration at that time, which differs from the one which shaped the monuments erected in the wake of the two World Wars. As various studies have shown, there has been a major shift in the language of public monuments in the twentieth century, affecting both their form and their subject matter.[33] Exemplified by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington (erected 1982), this sea-change in monument-building entailed a shift away from the celebration of exceptional heroes to the mourning of 'ordinary' victims, from upward-looking to downward-looking designs, and from figuration to modernist minimalism in the aesthetic form. This paradigm shift coincided with a

gradual change in nomenclature. Increasingly the term 'monument' (often synonym for 'statue') has been replaced by 'memorial', the latter referring to a piece of public sculpture aiming to provoke reflection on victimhood rather than awe at individual achievement. It is important to note that the statues currently being contested are not usually referred to as memorials: they belong instead to the monumentalist 'great men' tradition of public sculpture. Many of them date from the decades preceding World War One, a period which also coincided with the high point of colonialism and its commemoration.

Secondly, *monuments are material presences* and, as such, generate affect in a very physical way. They take up space and those in the monumentalist tradition are often located in city centres where, as large objects, they force traffic to go around them. They not only give symbolic expression to the values with which the depicted figures are associated, their very physical presence is itself a way of imposing those values on society while claiming to speak on behalf of the community at large. Since having access to money and power is a precondition of their existence, they have traditionally been erected by the victors and not by the defeated, by the empowered rather than the precariat. Because of the costs entailed in their erection, moreover, monuments are usually late comers in the dynamics of cultural memory. A large monument is rarely in the vanguard of cultural and social change, but rather consolidates the memory work done in other media by translating particular narratives into a lasting, if not permanent form. Through the very durability of its materials, a monument seeks to fix memory and, in doing so, also lays claim to remembrance long into the future (often indeed, in the form of time capsules buried in the foundations).[34]

A prime location is key to impact. Since city space is a limited resource, commemoration through monuments is arguably more prone to a competitive logic than other mediated forms of commemoration, and more dependent on access to power and resources. A monument's often

highly public presence helps to passively forget alternative narratives and, on occasion, to actively forget those alternatives by recycling earlier structures. The gigantic monument erected to Stalin in Budapest in 1951, for example, used some 40,000 tons of bronze recycled from older Hungarian statues which had been melted down for the purpose of imposing a Soviet-based mnemonic regime and displacing the nationalist one; the very materials used as well as the sheer size of the monument bespoke the power of the Stalinist regime (it was subsequently destroyed in the 1956 uprising).[35]

In short: monuments as material presences have a performative force that exceeds their symbolic meaning. To use Jane Bennett's term, they constitute 'vibrant matter', not least because they are often very large.[36] In their very materiality, they are designed to edify, generate awe, display power, inspire enthusiasm or, as in the case of more recent memorials, quiet reflection. Recognising the vibrancy of monuments as material objects helps explain why they can become so profoundly offensive in the cityscape: toxic presences. The Paris Commune formulated this toxicity in a striking way when they decreed on 12 April 1871 that the Vendôme Column be destroyed on the grounds that it was 'an *affirmation* of militarism, a *negation* of international law, a *permanent insult* to the vanquished on the part of conquerors, a *perpetual attack* on one of the three great principles of the French Republic – fraternity [emphasis AR]'.[37]

As the highlighted words indicate, the Column's presence was experienced in agentic and performative terms, that is, as having the power to impact on conditions in the world; in this case, to insult supporters of international fraternity by celebrating the memory of militarism. The Column was experienced as toxic to such a degree that huge resources were directed to its solemn removal on 16 May 1871, at a time when the Commune itself was under fierce attack from the government forces.

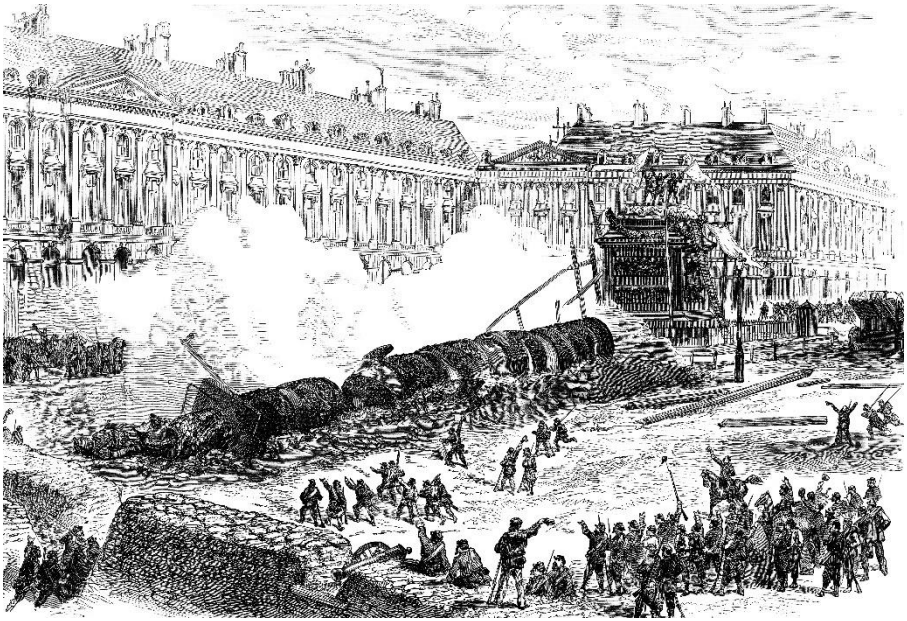

**Figure 3:** Destruction of the Vendôme Column by the Commune, 16 May 1871. Contemporary drawing: anon. Alamy Stock Image.

The highly dramatic, and widely broadcast, demolition of the offending column provides a striking example of the vibrancy of monuments and the importance attached to their destruction as a marker of political and mnemonic regime change. Moreover, its timing (one week before the Commune ended in wholesale slaughter) suggests that the symbolic importance of its physical removal transcended military expediency.

But apparently not all monuments are vibrant all of the time, and this needs to be recognised too. 'There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments', Robert Musil famously wrote: 'conspicuously inconspicuous', they repel our attention 'like water droplets off oilcloth'.[38] This was echoed by the historian Reinhart Koselleck, who claimed that monuments were actually a first step towards oblivion:

once the memory of a person or event was outsourced to an object, he argued, people would start to forget them.[39] A recent survey among Parisians suggests that many people indeed overlook monuments in their neighbourhood and often are not even aware of having seen them at all.[40] Once the initial buzz around their erection has passed, they can fade into invisibility and inertia. That this undeniably happens makes it all the more fascinating to know why, in certain cases and at critical moments, monuments start to vibrate again. They then step out of the urban wallpaper as it were and become objects of concern. This happens, I will show, when their presence becomes toxic and, linked to this, when an alternative narrative becomes available.

Third, *monuments offer a material resource for counter-memory.* As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, the history of iconoclasm provides multiple examples of monuments being destroyed, relocated, and recycled in new contexts. Despite outcries to the contrary, recent iconoclasm has rarely led to the actual destruction of physical monuments, but instead has brought into play a whole range of decommissioning practices that deprive the monument of its power to offend. This includes *reframing*, when monuments are moved to museums where they become objects of historical curiosity, 'display objects' rather than political forces.[41] It also includes *resignifying*, when monuments are over-written with new plaques, graffiti or laser displays, or juxtaposed with another monument in such a way as to take on a new meaning.[42] Best practices are still being worked out. Suffice it here to point to the practical importance of a toxic monument as an actual resource for bringing into visibility the events and actors it had, actively or passively, forgotten. The old provides a leg-up – and often a physical projection screen – for the new and for the 'coming into appearance' of minoritized groups.

Finally, *monuments are platforms for dissent*. They offer a physical location for the playing out of disagreements about shared memory and

collective identity. This has to do in the first instance with the fact that they are structurally anachronistic. If their material durability means laying claim to the future, it is also what allows them regularly to outlive their moral sell-by date and ability to command respect. Precisely because they have been built to last, they can also outlast the context in which they were produced and the cultural values that led them to be erected. As alternative narratives emerge in other more rapid response domains, monuments end up serving as the visible, public, and tangible reminder of an outdated mnemonic regime. If their erection is often belated (as mentioned earlier, they come late in the dynamics of cultural memory), so too is their contestation: they are often one of the last relics of an older regime. Contesting these mnemonic fossils accordingly provides the capstone to a slow process of transformation in ideas about who 'we' are, allowing the changes that have been prepared in other media to be consolidated in a very public and dramatic way.

In this process, materiality and locatedness are key. As multiple episodes in recent years have shown, toxic monuments provide a physical point of assembly where activists gather to voice their dissent. Gestures of *dis*respect towards the monument (in the form of graffiti, paint, slogans, and physical attacks) are designed precisely to undo their historical claim to command respect. Such gestures of disrespect are thus a way of publicly performing mnemonic change in the mode of what Victor Turner has called a 'social drama': rituals of transition that help a society move from one identity to another.[43] Even for those who resist such change and defend the old regime, the monuments provide literally a common ground for staking out differences. In the words of Sarah Genzburger, they help create 'a shared political space – even if that space is conflictual'.[44]

In what follows, I propose to bring these theoretical considerations to bear on a particular case: the toppling of the statue to Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020. In doing so, I will show the larger dynamic in which

the toppling was positioned, and then use the case to ponder further how mnemonic regime change relates to social transformation.

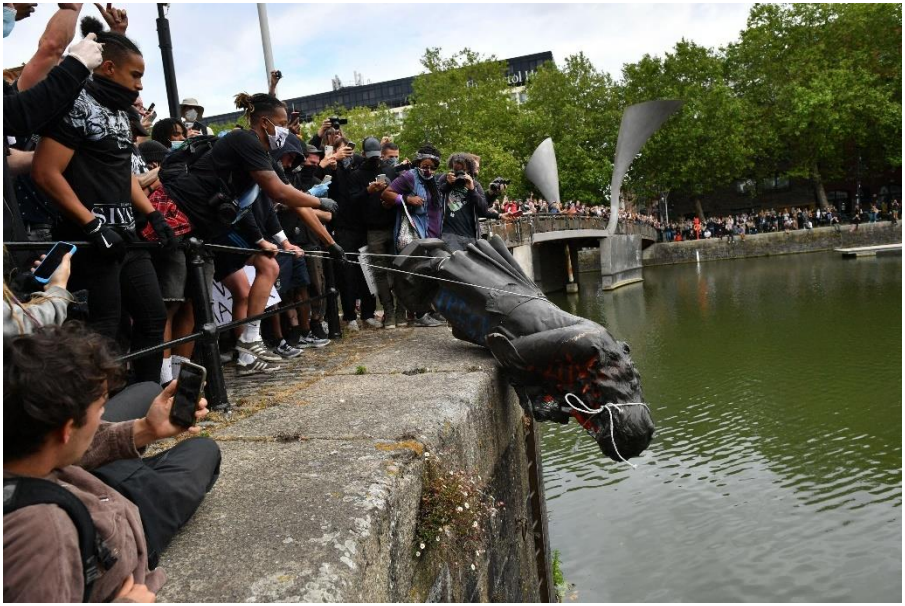

**Figure 4**. Demonstrators throw the statue of Colston into Bristol Harbour, UK, 7 June 2020. Photo: PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo.

## Erected/Rejected by the Citizens of Bristol

The story of Edward Colston (1636-1721) is by now well known. A merchant operating from the city of Bristol, he was a member of the Royal African Company (1680-92) and, as such, a key player in the Atlantic slave trade of the time. Having become extremely wealthy, he become a benefactor to the city where schools and hospitals long carried his name. From the eighteenth century onwards his munificence was celebrated in an annual 'Colston day' that gave special buns to children

and, later, a free day to workers. In 1895, more than 150 years after his death, a statue was 'erected by the citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city', as the plaque put it. The larger-than-life effigy of Colston depicts its subject in a contemplative pose, looking down from his considerable height. The statue itself was 2.64 metres high and it stood on a 3.2-metre plinth: a big presence in a very central spot in the city. It was paid for by public subscription.[45] The statue, while depicting Colston, also indirectly evokes the memory of 'the citizens of Bristol' who erected it in the last years of the nineteenth century.

**Figure 5:** Statue of Edward Colston, Bristol, UK, 24 June 2019. Photo: Simon Cobb. CC0.1.0

So what exactly did 'the citizens of Bristol' want to remember (and to forget) when they put up this tribute to Colston? The memorial plaque directed the viewer towards remembering Colston as 'a virtuous and wise man' and hence above all as a philanthropist and city father. Within the broader memory culture of the time, this celebration of a merchant-cum-benefactor can be seen as a way of asserting the rights of the middle and mercantile classes to be immortalized in public statuary and hence of criticizing the long tradition of celebrating only military heroes and members of the aristocracy.[46] A recent study has established, moreover, a link between the promotion of Colston by the city elite and labour unrest in the early 1890s.[47] From this perspective, the statue was an attempt on the part of the local elite to re-assert their role as benefactors in face of the growing importance of organized labour and demands for workers' rights by literally making their fellow citizens 'look up' to Colston. Both explanations are plausible and mutually compatible. Whatever the exact combination of factors that led to the monument, there is every reason to assume that Colston's role in the slave trade was not a central part of the discussion and that colonial aphasia allowed people to disconnect his role as philanthropist from the violent origins of his wealth.

Since then there has been a sea-change, however, with the current English Wikipedia article on the statue describing Colston in the first instance as a 'Bristol-born merchant and leading slave trader'.[48] Once a 'wise and virtuous man', Colston is now a symbol of Bristol's shameful complicity with slavery; his statue an anachronistic reminder that there was once a time when a slave-trader could be honoured as a philanthropist. Over the course of a century, the same object acquired a different meaning: framed no longer in terms of class as it was in the 1890s, but of race. How did this happen?

The dramatic image showing the statue of Edward Colston being dumped into Bristol harbour on 7 June 2020 hit the headlines as a

sudden explosion of iconoclastic anger that made sense in the protest-filled weeks following the death of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. This context was indeed an important catalyst of the events that afternoon in Bristol. However, research shows that the toppling itself did not come out of the blue for locals though it might have been new for outsiders. As Ana Lucia Araujo and others have shown, there had been long-term demands to have the statue to Colson removed which predated the 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement.[49] As early as 1998, the words 'slave trader' had been written on the monument, while in 2007 it had been painted red. In parallel, there were concerted efforts, spearheaded by a group of activists called 'Countering Colston-Campaign to Decolonise Bristol', to have the name and image of Colston removed from public buildings (this had led, in 2017, to a decision to rename the concert hall and, in 2018, to remove Colston's portrait from the mayoral office).[50] There had also been lengthy negotiations about the wording of a new plaque, which had nevertheless failed to reach agreement on how to formulate the nature of Colston's involvement, and hence the implication of the city, in slavery.

Although Colston was the most visible target of these campaigns, they were not ultimately only about downgrading him. Crucially, the anti-Colston campaign ran in parallel to a series of milestones linked to the recovery of knowledge about Bristol's past as a slave-trading hub. New historical research revealing the extent of Bristol's indebtedness to slavery was made available through the local museum and civil society organisations, including a Slave Trade Action Group founded in 1997. This revised narrative of Bristol's history entered into the public sphere, slowly but surely, across different media. These included Philippa Gregory's novel *A Respectable Trade* (1995) and its adaptation by the BBC to a four-part TV series in 1998, a commemorative plaque to the victims of the slave trade (1998), the naming of the Pero bridge after one of the few named victims (2007), and a permanent exhibition on slavery

in the city's M Shed museum (2018). The national Anti-Slavery Day (inaugurated in 2010) also regularly provided an occasion for memory activism, including most notably an installation from 2018 which highlighted Colston's complicity with the slave trade by adding the outlines of a slave ship to the pavement around the statue: dozens of supine figures were lined up within the boundaries of the virtual hold while a link was established to contemporary forms of slavery through labels such as 'domestic servants' and 'fruit pickers'.[51] The toxic Colston ironically provided a platform for showcasing these alternative perspectives on the past and present of the city in ways that were more arresting, if less durable, than the addition of a revised plaque might have been.


**Figure 6**: Installation, Anti-slavery Day, Bristol, UK, 18 October 2018. Photo: Stuart Holdsworth_inspiringcity.com.

As these archival and artistic initiatives suggest, the groundwork for the toppling of the statue in June 2020 had been prepared in other cultural practices. These had helped to reframe the statue by offering a counter-memory about Bristol which explained the source of its historical wealth and the presence of a significant black-Caribbean minority in the city today. In a two-way process, local history was uploaded to the larger decolonial narratives emerging in national and transnational arenas; conversely, these larger narratives helped in reframing local history and in undoing the aphasia that had long affected it. This combination of local, national, and transnational developments provided resources for an alternative narrative about Bristol. Crucially, the toppling of the statue would have been impossible without the availability of an alternative narrative poised to take over the place vacated by Colston. Memory evolves accumulatively and dialectically, meaning in this case that anti-racist activists used Colston's statue as a resource for articulating their alternative narrative of the city. Decommissioning Colston went together with un-forgetting, and the two processes need to be considered together.

Un-forgetting also pertained to the physical statue itself, which provided a public platform for bringing the Black Lives Matter narrative into visibility – in the 2018 installation mentioned earlier, but also in the posters and graffiti with which the statue was bedecked in June 2020.


**Figure 7**: Empty Pedestal of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, UK, 6 June 2020. Photo: Caitlin Hobbes. CC BY 3.0

This strategy of 'over-writing' monuments has many international precedents, especially in the Black Lives Matter contestation of statues in the US. As these examples show, memory activism and antiracism were deeply intertwined. For those protesting the monument and advocating for a greater recognition of the city's historical implication in slavery, at stake was not the distant past as such but the perpetuation of historical forms of racism in the present. Within the emerging counter-narrative, the statue honouring Colston was not just a reminder that slavery had occurred, and that as late as the 1890s people could still ignore it by considering someone so actively involved in the trade as virtuous. From a certain point on, allowing Colston's statue to remain standing, despite repeated attempts by civil society groups to have it removed or relabelled, became an aggravated symptom of contemporary social inequalities. To leave it stand with impunity was read as a continuation of the past rather than a break with it. This argument would later be used in the legal defence of the so-called Colston Four who were accused of criminal damage to the statue, but acquitted in January 2022; namely, that instead of being guilty of a criminal act, they were actually 'preventing a crime' in toppling Colston since 'it was a criminal offense to keep that statue up'.[52] In this way, the statue was being outlawed from the realm of the legitimate to that of the criminal. As a guerrilla retooling of the plaque on the empty pedestal on 11 June 2020 made clear: the statue that was once 'erected by the citizens of Bristol' was now 'rejected by the citizens of Bristol'.


**Figure 8**: Reworked plaque of the Colston monument, 11 June 2020. Photo: JMF News/Alamy Photo Stock.

At the time of writing (June 2022), a decision has yet to be taken on the future of the empty pedestal (so far the gravitation has been towards temporary installations that avoid the risk of becoming anachronistic).[53] The day after the statue was dumped in the harbour, it was retrieved by the city authorities. Since June 2021, it has been relocated to a local museum – now in a horizontal position and still carrying the paint thrown at it by the protesters on the same afternoon it was taken down both literally and figuratively from its pedestal.[54]

**Figure 9:** Statue of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston, M Shed museum, Bristol, UK, 4 June 2021. Photo: Zefrog/Alamy Stock Photo.

Displayed in this way, alongside some of the posters left by protesters, it has become a historical curiosity rather than an irritant in the public space. Although the removal of the statue led to some kickback on the part of counter-protesters who saw it as an assault on their heritage and identity,[55] as well as kickback from the conservative government who has since introduced legislation that envisages severe punishment for damage to statues, the Bristol City Council has taken no moves to have the statue reinstated. In the meantime, a commission set up under its auspices has recommended that the statue be kept in the museum.[56]

Whatever the outcome, it would appear that the dominant view of Colston has now irrevocably changed, and his return to unquestioned pre-eminence in the city is inconceivable. Witness the actual disbanding in September 2020 of the Colston society which had been instrumental

in perpetuating his legacy over a period of almost three centuries.[57] Witness too the acquittal of the Colston Four of criminal wrongdoing in January 2022, mentioned earlier, which provided a further endorsement of the legitimacy of the campaign against Colston.

Ironically, Colston's statue may have become even more visible since June 2020 than it ever had been before (who outside of Bristol had heard of him?). But renewed vibrancy went at the cost of his becoming part of a very different story and, in the end, a piece of history rather than a toxic presence in the public sphere. The decision to relocate the statue to the local museum, while leaving traces of the protest against him, means that the statue now carries the memory of Colston, the memory of his nineteenth-century supporters and, finally, the memory of his toppling. The result is a more complex and palimpsestic story; it is 'not an attack on history. It is history', as the historian David Olusoga put it.[58] As such the case exemplifies how memory and identity are subject to negotiation under a democracy. This needs to be emphasized in response to those who have complained that removing a statue means destroying 'our' history and that this, as the recent government proposal put it, is a criminal act deserving of a stiff prison sentence.[59]

## Conclusion

The Colston case shows the importance of approaching public controversies about monuments from the perspective of the dynamics of cultural memory and in relation to the social, political, and legal conditions in which it operates. As carriers of stories, material objects, resources for articulating new narratives, and as platforms for dissent, they are actants in the complex process of mnemonic regime change that leads from celebration to decommissioning, and from aphasia to un-

forgetting. This complexity is belied by the dramatic images of toppling that reach the media but occlude the wider context.

There is nevertheless a lot to be said for the idea that statue toppling can indeed mark a crucial moment – a turning point, a point of no return – in the transformation of a collective narrative. In marking the rejection of the old, it consolidates an emergent counter-memory and brings it to a high level of local, national, and transnational visibility. In short, the case of Colston gives a clear illustration of how memory can be profoundly remade,[60] allowing one to speak of mnemonic regime change by analogy with political regime change. However, it also gives new food for thought on the nature of that transformation and wider impact.

As the dust on the Colston case is settling, voices are being raised about the importance, but also the limits of memory in social transformation. Yes, it is argued, Colston has been de-commissioned and racism is no longer publicly tolerated in the city's monuments; in that sense a corner has been turned. However, there is still inequality in housing and access to resources: so what has really changed?[61] Although the statue was important as a symbol of ongoing racism, and its decommissioning an important activist tactic, its decommissioning has not (yet) yielded the social transformation that is the activists' ultimate goal. Indeed, after a certain point, it became apparent that the Colston monument was a proxy for other concerns. In retrospect – ironically, but perhaps also inevitably – Colston is now not as important as he seemed to be while he was still looking down on the people of Bristol. The downside of putting a particular figure or moment in the past to rest – allowing it to become part of the past rather than of the now – is that it then loses its power as a resource for reconfiguring the present. As long as it was standing, the statue could be a vector in the struggle for social justice, but this back story did not end with its toppling. For this reason, one can predict that new objects of mnemonic contention will come into visibility as a resource for performing dissent and that this, in turn, will produce

kickbacks in defence of a purportedly immutable 'heritage'. In practice, then, social and mnemonic change occurs more slowly than the toppling of a statue might suggest; memory crabwalks towards the future.

I began this essay by suggesting that the current iconoclastic wave seems unique in not being a by-product of military conflict or political revolution, but of contentious politics. They are bottom-up attempts on the part of activists to change the collective narrative as a step towards changing society. In order to fully explain the current wave of iconoclasm, however, we need a better understanding of how cultural memory informs the present: both its importance and its limits. While the Colston case yields many insights into the dynamics of remembering and (un)forgetting, of attacking and defending 'heritage', it also raises new questions about both the value and the limits of mnemonic change as a catalyst of social transformation. Further research in this area will also require a better understanding of the memory-activism nexus and of the various modalities – crises, tipping points, slow swerving – through which mnemonic regime change is slowly played out.

## Endnote

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Removal_of_Confederate_monuments_and_memorials#:~:text=According%20to%20an%20April%202020,the%20power%20to%20decree%20removal; Also M. A. J. Hasian N. S. & Paliewicz, *Memory and Monument Wars in American Cities: New York, Charlottesville and Montgomery* (London, 2020); S. Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC, 2018 [1998]).

[2] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58893051#:~:text=Mexico%20City's%20governor%20has%20confirmed,threatened%20to%20tear%20it%20down.

[3] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57693683.

[4] For an overview of developments, see https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2021/may/22/racist-statues-monuments-removed-us-world.

[5] On the history of iconoclasm, see A. Von Tunzelman, *Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues that Made History* (London, 2021); D. Jethro, *Heritage Formation and the Senses in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Aesthetics of Power* (London, 2019); A. Omissi, 'Damnatio Memoriae or Creatio Memoriae? Memory Sanctions as Creative Processes in the Fourth Century AD', in: *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 62 (2016), 170-199; R. Clay, 'Re-Making French Revolutionary Iconoclasm', in: *Perspective [online]* 1 (2012), 181-186; R. S. Nelson & M. Olin (eds), *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago, 2003); D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London, 1997); F.D. Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and Their Motives* (Maarssen, 1985); L. Réau, *Histoire du vandalisme: les monuments détruits de l'art francais* (Paris, 1959). Focussing on secular monuments this article leaves aside iconoclasm linked to religious controversies.

[6] K. D. Alley, 'Gandhiji on the Central Vista: A Postcolonial Refiguring', in: *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997), 967-994; Z. Çelik, 'Colonial Statues and their Afterlives', in: *The Journal of North African Studies* 25/5 (2020), 711-726; D. Hassett, 'A Tale of Two Monuments: The War Memorials of Oran and Algiers and Commemorative Culture in Colonial and Post-Colonial Algeria', in: S. Sumartojo & B. Wellings (eds), *Commemorating Race and Empire in the Great War* (Liverpool, 2018), 151-168; L. Larsen, 'Re-Placing Imperial Landscapes: Colonial Monuments and the Transition to Independence in Kenya', in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012), 45-56; Von Tunzelman, *Fallen Idols*; Y. Whelan, 'The Construction and Destruction of a Colonial Landscape: Monuments to British Monarchs in Dublin Before and After Independence', in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 28/4 (2002), 508-533.

[7] Larsen offers a detailed account of the steps taken in the run-up to independence to protect colonial monuments in Kenya; see Larsen, 'Re-Placing Imperial Landscapes'. Hassett studies comparable examples with reference to the decolonization of Algeria; see Hassett, 'A Tale of Two Monuments'. Footage relating to the toppling of the figure of J.P. Coen in Jakarta in 1943 can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-crU3j-XnA.

[8] A. Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford, 2012), 150, The commemoration of Joan of Arc in North Africa is discussed in Hassett,

'A Tale of Two Monuments'. The commemoration of Camões in relation to Portuguese colonialism is discussed in P. De Medeiros, 'Whose Camões? Canons, Celebrations, Colonialisms', in: J. Leerssen & A. Rigney (eds), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (London, 2014), 283-294.

[9] The concept of memory activism is drawn from Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (London, 2022); Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg, 'Challenging the Meaning of the Past from Below: A Typology for Comparative Research on Memory Activists', in: *Memory Studies, [first online]* (2021), 1-17; J. Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Post-War Germany* (Cambridge, 2017).

[10] Where Genzburger and Beiner use the term 'de-commemoration', the term decommissioning has been preferred here (and in Rigney 2022) because of its association with power and the active dismantling of weaponry. See S. Genzburger, 'The Paradox of (De)Commemoration: Do People Really Care about Statues', in: *The Conversation* https://theconversation.com/the-paradox-of-de-commemoration-do-people-really-care-about-statues-141807) [19 August 2020]; G. Beiner, 'When Monuments Fall: The Significance of Decommemorating', in: *Eire-Ireland,* 56/1-2 (2021), 33-61; A. Rigney, 'Decomissioning Monuments, Mobilizing Materialities', in: Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (London, 2022).

[11] On the memory-activism nexus, see A. Rigney, 'Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism Beyond the Traumatic', in: *Memory Studies* 11/3 (2018), 368-380.

[12] Omissi, 'Damnatio Memoriae or Creatio Memoriae?'.

[13] A. Erll, 'Cultural Memory', in: M. Middeke, T. Müller, C. Wald, H. Zapf (eds), *English and American Studies* (Stuttgart, 2012), 238.

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[15] A. Rigney, 'Remembrance as Remaking: Memories of the Nation Revisited', in: *Nations and Nationalism* (2018) 24/2, 240-257.

[16] M. Cardina & I. N. Rodrigues, 'The Mnemonic Transition: The Rise of an Anti-Colonial Memoryscape in Cape Verde', in: *Memory Studies* 14/2 (2020), 380-394.

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[18] P. Ricoeur, 'Memory - History – Forgetting', in: J. Rüsen, *Meaning and Representation in History* (Oxford, 2006), 9-19. The sizeable literature on forgetting and different forms of amnesia also includes L. Passerini, 'Memories Between Silence and Oblivion', in: K. Hodgkin & S. Radstone (eds), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (London, 2003), 238-54; P. Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', in: *Memory Studies* 1/1 (2008), 59–71; A. Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen, 2016).

[19] Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', 61-62.

[20] A. L. Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France', in: *Public Culture* 23/1 (2011), 121-156. For an illustration of the operation of colonial aphasia and its slow overcoming, see also P. Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam, 2015).

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[22] The un-forgetting of colonial soldiers is discussed in A, Rigney, 'Remaking Memory and the Agency of the Aesthetic', in: *Memory Studies* 14/1 (2021), 10-23.

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[25] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58893051

[26] N. Mirzoeff, *The Appearance of Black Lives Matter* (New York, 2017).

[27] A. Erll & A. Rigney (eds), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin, 2009); Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*; A. Erll, 'From 'District Six' to *District 9* and Back: The Plurimedial Production of Travelling Schemata', in: C. De Cesari & A. Rigney (eds), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin, 2014), 29-50.

[28] The phrase 'plurimedial networks' is borrowed from Erll, 'From 'District Six' to *District 9* and Back'.

[29] The changing language of monuments is discussed in A. Saunders, *Memorializing the GDR: Monuments and Memory after 1989* (Oxford, 2018); K. Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ, 2018 [1997]); J. Leerssen & A. Rigney (eds), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (Basingstoke, 2014); E. Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feelings in America* (Chicago, 2010); Nelson & Olin, *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*; M. Campbell & J.M. Labbe (eds), *Memory and Memorials 1789-1914: Literary and Cultural Perspectives* (London, 2000); A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998); K. A. Marling & J. Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); C. Tacke, *Denkmal im sozialen Raum: nationale Symbole in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1995); J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995); A. Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero, 1800-1864: Monuments to the British Victors of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York, 1988); A. Riegl, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments', in: *Oppositions*, 25 (1982 [1928]), 21-51.

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[31] B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social : An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, 2005).

[32] My application of the concept of assemblage to monuments is inspired by R. Chidgey, *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times* (London, 2018).

[33] A major shift has been identified in the aftermath of World War One; see Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning.* The turning point has also been located in the post-Holocaust world; see J. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT, 1993); J. Young, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (Amherst, MA, 2016).

[34] Time capsules, including contemporary newspapers and other items of importance to the monument-builders, were regularly included in statues erected in the late nineteenth century; for examples, see Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*, 74-75; A. Rigney, 'Commemoration by Committee: The National Wallace Monument', in: *Victorian Review* 44/1 (2018), 1-5.

[35] On the Budapest monument see Von Tunzelman, *Fallen Idols*; C. Leggewie, *Der Kampf um die europaïsche Erinnerung: Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (Munich, 2011).

[36] J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC, 2010).

[37] Decree signed on 12 April, published *in Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris, Jeudi 13 avril 1871*; https://gabrielperi.fr/commune-de-paris/decret-ordonnant-la-demolition-de-la-colonne-de-la-place-vendome-12-avril-1871/.

[38] R. Musil, 'Monuments', in: *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, Trans. Peter Wortsman (New York, 2006), 64.

[39] R. Koselleck, 'Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden', in: O. Marquard & K. Stierle (eds), *Identität (Poetik und Hermeneutik VIII)* (Munich, 1979), 255-276.

[40] Genzburger, 'The Paradox of (De)Commemoration'.

[41]The concept of display object is taken from B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA, 1998).

[42] Examples of these resignifying practices are offered in Rigney, 'Decomissioning Monuments, Mobilizing Materialities'; a striking example of a toxic monument being incapsulated in a new one is offered in Çelik, 'Colonial Statues and their Afterlives'.

[43] V. Turner, 'Social Dramas and the Stories about Them', in: *Critical Inquiry* 7/1 (1980), 141-168.

[44] Genzburger, 'The Paradox of (De)Commemoration'

[45] It had actually proved difficult to raise enough money, leaving the principal campaigner to foot a large part of the bill; R. Ball, 'Myths within Myths... Edward Colston and that Statue', in: *Bristol Radical History Group* (2018; updated 2020).

[46] With thanks to Joep Leerssen for this point.

[47] Ball, 'Myths within Myths'.

[48] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Edward_Colston [accessed 13 February 2022].

[49] A. L. Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past* (London, 2020), 68-87.

[50] https://counteringcolston.wordpress.com/.

[51] https://inspiringcity.com/2018/10/22/anti-slavery-installation-appears-next-to-edward-colston-statue-in-bristol/#:~:text=The%20installation%20was%20placed%20at,were%20taken%20on%20the%20day.

[52] Interview with defense lawyer Raj Chada; https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/jan/06/colston-four-acquittal-raises-doubts-about-10-year-jail-term-proposal. David Olusoga was also quoted as saying that 'the real offense was in allowing a statue to a mass murderer to stand for 125 years'. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-59892211#:~:text=Prof%20David%20Olusoga%20said%20the,and%20thrown%20into%20Bristol's%20harbourside.

[53] An alternative statue by artist Marc Quinn (called "Surge of Power" and depicting a black activist called Jean Reid ) was put up on the pedestal in the night of 14-15 July 2020; it was removed soon afterwards by the authorities, since no permission had been requested from the city; nor had support been solicited in the antiracist community. More recent proposals can be found at: https://www.bristolcreatives.co.uk/news/2020/08/31/peoples-platform-submissions-welcome.

[54] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/28/statue-of-slave-trader-edward-colston-to-go-on-display-in-bristol-museum.

[55] Counter protests in defense of the statue are well documented in the documentary *Statue Wars: One Summer in Bristol*, dir. F. Welch (BBC, 2021).

[56] https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-60247092 (3 February 2022).

[57] T. Cork, 'Edward Colston – the statue, the plinth and everything that's happened since it toppled', in: *Bristol Live* (22 August 2020).

[58] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/08/edward-colston-statue-history-slave-trader-bristol-protest.

[59] The recent wave of iconoclasm directed at symbols of British colonialism is largely believed to have provoked the recent government proposal, currently under discussion in the House of Lords, to impose a prison sentence of up to 10 years for the damaging of monuments; https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2839.

[60] On remembrance as 'remaking', see Rigney, 'Remembrance as Remaking: Memories of the Nation Revisited'.

[61] https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/one-year-colston-moment-changed-5493777; https://peoplesplatform.co.uk/Pages/Future.html.

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# Absence and Presence: Nona Faustine and the Black Body in the National History of the United States

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How should the history of Black Americans be included in the physical landscape and memorialised? What new visual vocabularies are needed to expand the idea of the nation? Nona Faustine's *White Shoes* series (begun in 2012) provides a compelling counternarrative to stereotypical and racist representations of Black Americans in public spaces. With her body, Faustine explores the links between colonialism, racism, and capitalism that continues to be celebrated in public monuments in the United States. Her works invite viewers to participate in and interact with the built environment in new ways that acknowledge these public spaces as sites of nationalism intimately connected to the history of US racism – slave labour, Jim Crow, and police violence. In *White Shoes*, Nona Faustine contests dominant and entrenched national myths through the materiality of her body – her Black body. Her interventions in public space re-inscribe a neglected history onto the urban landscapes of New York City. Faustine's work challenges white patriarchal dominance through mediated images of Black bodies by creating presence where there is absence.

**Keywords:** Black nationalism, urban landscape, commemoration, Black Lives Matter, public art.

## Introduction

In stark contrast to the 1,747 Confederate statues remaining in the United States, there are few monuments honouring Black Americans' stories or contributions. While the laws and policies that institutionalised segregation have largely been overturned, the antagonism, intolerance, and indifference towards Black Americans in the United States persist. This indifference is visible on school grounds, public squares, courthouses, and even in the United States Capitol Building, which contains statues of Confederate military officers from eight Southern states. Public and academic discourse surrounding the dismantling of Confederate monuments coincided with the waves of activism, in the 2010s, that arose from Black Lives Matter, a group dedicated to bringing attention to the injustices wrought upon people of colour. Activists also challenged the colonisation of public space by an antiquated Western memorial tradition and a neoclassical visual language. As reported by the Southern Poverty Law Center, over one hundred Confederate symbols had been removed, relocated, or renamed as of October 2020. However, the destruction, removal, or relocation of problematic monuments does not solve issues of representation. How should the history of Black Americans be included in the physical landscape and memorialised? What new vocabularies are needed to expand the idea of the nation? How can Black Americans publicly assert their *own* agency? The question of how to nationally recognise slavery and the violence directed towards Black Americans has predominantly focused on reparations.[1] Public memorials to Black figures have materialised more slowly.[2] To consider these questions, I first examine the problematic visual representations of emancipated Black Americans in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century statues and monuments. Through the example of Fred Wilson's unrealised sculpture *E Pluribus Unum*, I describe the challenges of attempting to understand nineteenth-century monumentality through a twenty-first century lens. My primary

focus, however, is artist Nona Faustine's *White Shoes* series (begun in 2012), which provides a compelling counternarrative to stereotypical and racist representations of Black Americans in public spaces.

In 1992, author bell hooks asked for new visualisations of a 'Black body politic', a new 'revolutionary visual aesthetic that re-appropriates, revises, and invents'.[3] The counter-monumentality of Faustine's performances create experiential landscapes that move beyond the observational gaze. Her works invite viewers to participate in and interact with the built environment in new ways that acknowledge these public spaces as sites of nationalism that are intimately connected to the history of US racism – slave labour, Jim Crow, and police violence. In *White Shoes*, Faustine contests dominant and entrenched national myths through the materiality of her body – her Black body – and her interventions in public space. Her site-specific work is ephemeral, but through documentary photographs (a more permanent record), she creates the sign or trace of a presence as a means of re-inscribing a neglected history onto the urban landscapes of New York City. Because those who benefit the most from forgetting are part of larger power structures, Faustine directly challenges institutionalised forgetting. However, she remains only as a fragment of the history she wishes to reinvoke; her impermanent installations seem to state, 'I was here' while simultaneously underscoring how people of colour continue to occupy marginalised spaces within the national narrative of the United States.

## Urban Landscapes of Commemoration

Kirk Savage's 1997 book, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monuments in Nineteenth-Century America*, was one of the first scholarly projects to address how the Civil War reshaped the cultural and physical landscape of the United States during the latter decades of the

nineteenth century.[4] As Savage shows, the shift from slavery to emancipation forced US citizens to confront their country's changed identity, which spurred one of the most prolific periods of monument-building in the country's history. Typically, it is the victors who raise statues to the heroic dead. But following the Civil War, it was the supporters of the former Confederate States of America who erected such monuments in order to create a landscape that supported the Lost Cause mythology: a nostalgic view of devotion to the Old South and a celebration of its soldiers, who, under its interpretation, fought heroically to preserve an honourable Christian life; this myth helped Southerners assuage the material and economic devastation of the South following the war.[5]

Monuments to the former Confederacy were commissioned as part of an explicit Civil War remembrance practice; rather, they were created in three distinct phases in reaction to the changing political and social landscape of the United States. The first phase was immediately after the end of the War. The period of greatest activity was around 1910. These monuments were erected primarily in former Confederate states in the South, but some were raised, and remain, in former Union states, including in New Jersey, Washington (state), Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Delaware, Indiana, and Iowa. Commemorative programs that commissioned Confederate monuments were not top-down affairs imposed by governmental agencies on a passive populace.[6] Private organisations were responsible for such initiatives, including various ladies' memorial associations, the Sons of Confederate Veterans (est. 1896), and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (est. 1894), which alone was responsible for roughly two hundred monuments.

In the second phase, Confederate monuments were added to the US civic landscape, such as courthouses and community squares, in the late nineteenth century, in conjunction with the rise of Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan in the South, and in the 1950s, in reaction to the rise of the

Civil Rights Movement. Such statues and memorials functioned as signs that materialise, externalise, and publicly archive white supremacy. A few were dedicated as recently as 2015. As noted in James Young's indispensable book *The Texture of Memory*, public monuments have traditionally been the most prestigious forms of commemoration, because they were designed as permanent showcases of public memory.[7] As Karen Cox explains, monuments are not just 'pillars of stone' but a reflection of a particular belief system.[8] The intended permanence of Confederate statues stands in stark contrast to the vulnerability of the churches, homes, schools, and lives of Black Americans that have been beset by violence. During the third phase, the monuments raised during Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954,[9] and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, coupled with strategic violence directed towards Black Americans and racially motivated gerrymandering and heritage laws, were an attempt to recreate the social, political, and economic order of the pre-emancipation era. Public spaces were thus colonised by a white historical narrative. As Cox notes, statues to the Confederacy served as beacons of white supremacy.[10] Some, however, have used the same statuary and monumental forms to combat it.

The first statue to be associated with anti-slavery sentiment was *The Greek Slave* (1844), by American sculptor Hiram Powers (1805-1873) (Figure 1). Powers' intention was not to create an abolitionist symbol but to present the American public with a nude sculpture in the neoclassical tradition. However, with its depiction of a youthful and diffident woman, *The Greek Slave* became a benign way for Americans to sympathise with those enslaved.[11] The 'classical' white nude body and downcast, non-confrontational gaze provided a safe symbol on which abolitionists could project their views. Poems and soliloquies inspired by the statue were published in anti-slavery publications, some of which connected the

plight of the white Greek slave to Black enslaved persons in the United States.[12]

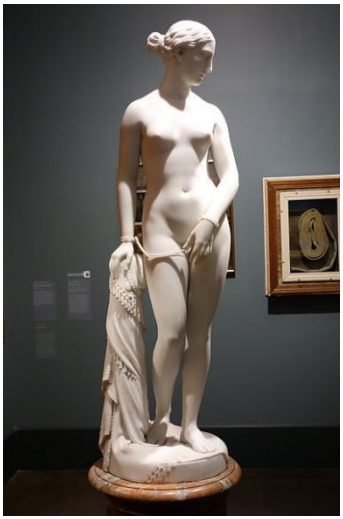


**Figure 1:** Hiram Powell, *The Greek Slave*, 1866, marble, 166.4 x 48.9 x 47.6 cm, Brooklyn Museum of Art. [CC0]. Image credit: Daderot.

Sculptures of Black bodies were produced after the Civil War, but they were limited in scope. A common trope was the grateful Black man beholden to the benevolence of white America. The story of the formerly enslaved was largely shaped by white sculptors for white (often private) audiences. A case in point is *The Freedman* by John Quincy Adams Ward (1830-1910), which was exhibited to the public in New York in 1863. The statue was variously described by a contemporary critic as a 'naked slave' who has 'burst from his shackles, and with uplifted face thanks God for his freedom' and claims that the statue represents 'the whole story of slavery and the bright story of emancipation.'[13] Another describes the figure as 'a man looking very quiet at his fetters'.[14] A third thought he resembled a 'fugitive' with a hand 'grasping his broken manacles with an energy that bodes no good for his pursuers'.[15] All of these statements

inaccurately describe the figure, and thus say more about the white viewers than the artwork: The man is not nude; a cloth is draped from his waist to his thighs. He gazes towards something off in the distance, not up towards God. He holds the broken manacle in his right hand, which is placed on a small support, and he rests his left forearm on his thigh. It is a posture of repose, not one of energy.

Unlike Ward's *Freedman*, which was created for a white audience, *Forever Free* (1867) by Black and Native American sculptor Edmonia Lewis (1844-1907) was intended for a Black audience. In 1869, it was presented to Leonard Grimes (1815-1873), a Black pastor, abolitionist, and conductor on the Underground Railroad (Figure 2). *Forever Free* was displayed at his church, Boston Baptist Tremont Temple Church, also known as 'The Fugitives Church', which suggests that Black audiences accepted the half-nude male figure as a depiction of the formerly enslaved. In *Forever Free*, Lewis utilised the established visual language of the newly emancipated. The male figure is bare chested, holding aloft broken chains; the female figure kneels in a prayer-like pose, her gaze lifted. There are few signifiers, apart from the male figure's curly hair, that mark the figures as Black, and the statue is free of sexual stereotypes about Black bodies – which may have been a deliberate choice by the artist.

**Figure 2:** Edmonia Lewis, *Forever Free*, marble, 104.7 × 27.9 × 43.1 cm, 1867. Howard University Art Gallery. [CC0]. Image credit: https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/mary-edmonia-lewis/forever-free/

Statues to emancipation, such as *Forever Free*, were largely privately commissioned and funded. Even the public monument *Emancipation Memorial* (1876), by Thomas Ball (1819-1911), was funded through private donations (Figure 3). Several contributions for this memorial came from emancipated citizens. Contributors, however, did not have any input into the design. The memorial, which was dedicated eleven years after Abraham Lincoln's death and is located in Lincoln Park in Washington, DC, is essentially a statue to Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln stands, holding pages from the Emancipation Proclamation in his right hand and hovering his left over a Black man kneeling at his feet. The

Emancipation Proclamation rests on a plinth upon which is a relief of George Washington, fasces, and a shield inscribed with thirteen stars representing the original thirteen colonies of the United States. The depiction of the emancipated man was originally modelled on Ball's own likeness, a white man.[16] Ball decided to rework the figure to resemble Archer Alexander, the last enslaved person to be captured under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. But this is not a portrait of Alexander, only a recognisable racial type. His wide nose and textured hair mark him as different from Lincoln. His muscles still suggest his value as a commodity. His partial nudity is a deliberate contrast to Lincoln's long coat and top hat, which signal the latter's civility.

The relationship between the two figures in *Emancipation Memorial* troubled Frederick Douglass (c. 1817-1895). Douglass spoke at the inauguration of the monument, but later that day he sent a letter to the newspaper *The National Republican*: 'What I want to see before I die is a monument representing the negro, not couchant on his knees like a four-footed animal, but erect on his feet like a man'.[17] Calls to remove the monument began in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer, as part of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests for racial justice. In 2020, protestors drew on Douglass's words to argue for the monument's removal. On 8 September, a cardboard sign was placed at the pedestal, quoting the words of Douglass from 1876: 'Admirable as is the monument by Mr. Ball in Lincoln's Park, it does not, as it seems to me, tell the whole truth […] there is room in Lincoln Park for another monument'. It included the hashtag #morehistory2021. Red paint was also splashed on the monument. Removing this memorial will be difficult, however, because it is on federal lands (the mayor of Washington, DC, does not have the same authority over public parks as the governors of the fifty states). A replica of *Emancipation Memorial* in Boston was successfully removed after local artist Tory Bullock gathered 12,000 signatures for an online

petition.[18] In the petition, Bullock wrote, 'I've been watching this man on his knees since I was a kid'.[19] Other residents said they felt it reinforced a racist and paternalistic view of Black people.[20] The monument was removed on 29 December 2020 after a unanimous vote by the Boston Art Commission.[21]

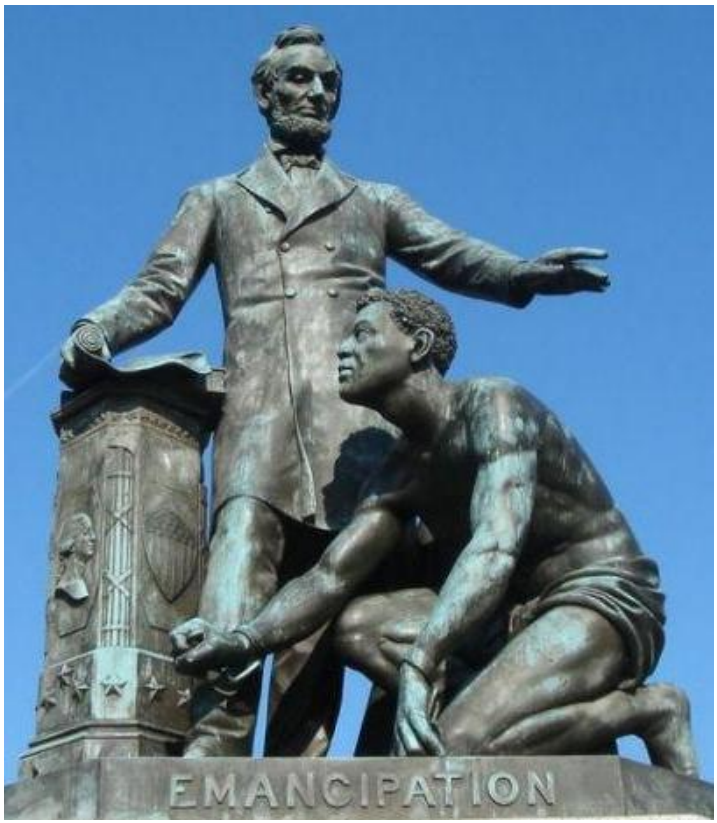



**Figure 3:** Thomas Ball, *Emancipation Memorial*, 1876, bronze (CC0).

Yet it is far simpler to call for the removal of offensive monuments than to agree on appropriate replacements. Many of the pedestals that

supported the likes of Robert E. Lee, the commander of the Confederate army, or Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States, remain vacant. This emptiness, when read through iconoclasm, may be a form of calculated forgetting or a clearing for the next iteration or interpretation of a historical event. Jaś Elsner suggests that the act of forgetting is just as active, purposeful, and collectively performed as that of preservation.[22] For those monuments that remain, they are supplemented rather than supplanted. The uneven approach to the treatment of monuments (their raising and razing) has meant that monuments honouring Black history are often in close proximity to monuments considered or near empty pedestals or plinths. An example can be seen in the equestrian statue of Confederate general Wade Hampton, which is mounted on a very high plinth, gazes out and over the African American History Monument (2001) at the South Carolina State House grounds.[23] The result may be a vivid contrast between two messages, which may risk cancelling each other out.[24] Often in such cases, the presence of Black history in monumental form is considered incidental to the dominant white history. Artist Fred Wilson (b. 1954) attempted to bridge the gap in these two histories in his unrealised *E Pluribus Unum* [Out of many, one].

In 2008, the Central Indiana Community Foundation commissioned Wilson to design a sculpture adjacent to the 1902 Soldiers and Sailors Monument as part of a larger public art project for the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, a bicycle and pedestrian path in Indianapolis, Indiana (Figure 4).[25] The Soldiers and Sailors Monument dominates downtown Indianapolis standing at 86.6 metres, only 4.7 metres shorter than the Statue of Liberty. It was designed to honour Indiana veterans, but does not name any of the Black companies that fought or individual men who died for the Union.[26]

Wilson proposed to add a statue a short distance from the monument that would critically challenge the statue group and insert a Black

individual very publicly into Indiana history. *E Pluribus Unum* was an effort to recontextualise the relief sculpture on the south side of the base, which depicts, among other figures, a nameless and semi-nude emancipated Black man (Figure 5). This man holds the lowest position amongst those in the statue group. He is seated on the ground at the feet of an allegorical female figure intended to represent liberty and peace. He holds his broken chains above his head in thanks for his freedom. As in other works depicting formerly enslaved persons, his posture and upward gaze imply an indebtedness to his benevolent white liberators, removing any agency formerly enslaved persons may have in the shaping of their own history. In *E Pluribus Unum*, Wilson planned to lift the image of the Black man directly from the monument and to place a replica of this figure on its own pedestal. *E Pluribus Unum* would have elevated the historical position of Black Americans in Indiana history. Shifted forwards on a tilted and three-tiered pedestal, Wilson's figure would appear to move into public space, no longer constrained by his subordinate position and no longer looking up, but out. In place of the shackles, he was to hold a flag composed of patterns representing the African diaspora. Wilson's aim was to create an image of a self-possessed man, not a metaphor.

**Figure 4:** Rudolf Schwartz, Soldiers and Sailors Monument, 1902. (CC0. Image credit: https://thisisindiana.angelfire.com/soldiersandsailorsmonument.htm)

**Figure 5:** Fred Wilson, *E Pluribus Unum,* scheduled to be unveiled 2011, 3 x 3.6 metres, unrealized. (CC0. Image credit: www.indyculturaltrail.org/E_Pluribus_Unum.html

Wilson hoped that his addition would inspire public discussions on the role of civic space within the context of racial history, and he assumed that modifications to his ideas would be part of the creative process. He was surprised by the intensity of opposition, from both Black and white communities, to his design. The Concerned Clergy of Indianapolis joined forces with the Citizens Against the Slave Image, which was formed explicitly in opposition to Wilson's design.[27] Leroy Robinson, a local history teacher, objected to the statue's semi-nudity and its placement in relation to the Soldiers and Sailors Monument.[28] In an op-ed piece for the *Indianapolis Recorder*, Robinson likened Wilson's statue to reproducing the racist stereotype of a 'lawn jockey' – a black-faced caricature holding a lamp or a hitching ring – and an afterthought installed in service to the larger monument. [29] Others perceived the figure's seated position as undermining the implied strength and power of standing statues, which are culturally linked to classical representation of athletes, statesmen, and warriors.

The Black figure in the 1902 monument was often overlooked and misunderstood. Some members of the public assumed that the shackles, which he raises in thanks to Liberty, were a symbol of his status as an enslaved person. This misunderstanding compromised Wilson's project, because some assumed that he was creating an image of slavery itself. In

the planning of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, members of the community were not consulted about its form or context, unlike for Wilson's *E Pluribus Unum*. Community engagement regarding Wilson's work ultimately highlighted differing views of how Black bodies – and Black history – should be represented in public space. Due to a failure to respond to the disputes over the meaning of *E Pluribus Unum*, the project was put on hold in 2010 and cancelled in December 2011.

Confederate figures or outdated racial stereotypes located in the spaces of government buildings – both in the interior and exterior – serve as reminders of the pervasive racism that was embraced and upheld in the very buildings that purported to support the citizenship of Black people. Nona Faustine inserts her body into the complicated narrative of those very sites. The titles of her works emphasise the implicit relationship between the wealth of the United States and the disenfranchisement of Black Americans, and she subverts the monumentality of that narrative in the landscape of New York City.

## Nona Faustine: A Black Body Politic and a New Revolutionary Visual Aesthetic

With her series *White Shoes* (begun in 2012), Brooklyn-born and based artist Nona Faustine (b. 1977) aims to reinsert the truths and traumas of racism into the narratives of US history. The project consists of self-portraits taken at locations significant to the hidden history of slavery in New York City. Wearing white pumps, symbolic of the white patriarchy, Faustine documents her body as a conduit or receptor – in both protest and solidarity – for people whose names have been forgotten and whose contributions remain unacknowledged. For Faustine, self-portraiture enables her to respond to images of people who were put on display as examples of inferiority and thus to reclaim visibility for Black women

whose histories were not only subsumed by those of white owners but were also erased through marriage and the loss of original family names. Faustine draws on the historiography of statues and monuments from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and turns her body into monuments to Black history as well as a monument to the erasure of that history.

For 'The White Shoes Series', Faustine stands at sites in New York City that are still occupied by enslaved people who are literally buried under steel and concrete or otherwise obscured. In *Negro Burial Ground*, an image in the series, Faustine stands at the Metropolitan Transit Authority bus depot at East 126th in Manhattan, under which lies a burial ground dating from 1658 (Figure 6). The cemetery became part of the Reformed Low Dutch Church of Harlem, founded in 1660. In 2008, archivists from the Elmendorf Reformed Church, which now stands at the site of the Reformed Low Dutch Church, found records indicating that free and enslaved Africans were buried at the site. In 2015, 140 bone fragments were found at Elmendorf Reformed Church.[30]. The bus depot closed in 2015, and a memorial on the site is planned.

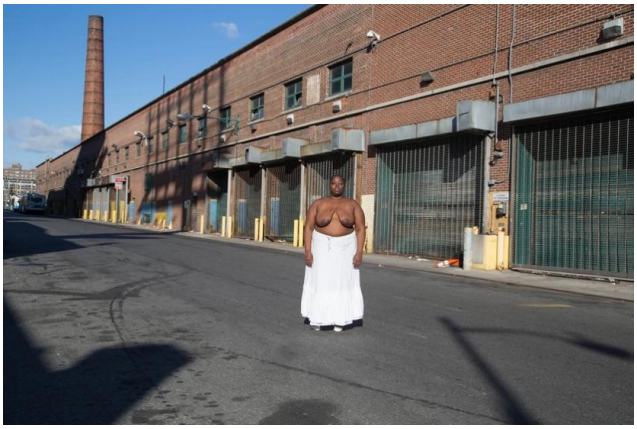


**Figure 6:** Faustine, *Negro Burial Ground* from the 'White Shoes Series,' 2021. Chromogenic photograph.

In *Negro Burial Ground*, Faustine stands on the foundation, so to speak, of New York City, the first national capital of the United States after the Constitution was ratified in 1788. Faustine looks directly out at the viewer in contrast to the emancipated, kneeling men of the nineteenth century. She meets each of us as an equal and not in submission or with gratitude. The tips of her white high-heeled shoes peek out from beneath the hem of a bright white floor-length cotton skirt. Her white skirt is in stark contrast to both her dark skin and the blacktop making for a visually arresting and jarring image. Each of the sites she includes in 'White Shoes' has a complex and contradictory history that is concealed, often by the very process of memorialisation itself. Faustine's work is in part grounded in the rhetoric of Black nationalism, which challenges the historical and contemporary distribution of power in the United States in opposition to white racial and colonial domination, cultural hegemony, economic exploitation, and poverty. Black nationalism promotes Black self-determination and considers it essential that Black Americans be able to exert control over institutions, and their visibility in those institutions, within the overarching national narrative of the United States. Faustine places herself at the sites and spaces of Black American experiences as a symbol of the forgotten, the un-memorialised within the larger framework of the United States, which privileges a white-narrative as nationalist rhetoric. After the Civil War, the idea of the nation was cast in the form of the ordinary white man placing the black man on the margins of history.[31] They became the focus of collective participation in public life embodying a perceived essential historical certainty.

Faustine's process owes a debt to Yoko Ono's 'Fluxus' performances of the 1960s and Ana Mendieta's earth-body performances of the late 1970s and 1980s.[32] Both women transgressed personal boundaries by placing themselves in vulnerable positions either emotionally or physically. Their work was produced during a period of social protest

and political agitations in feminist and identity-based art. The early performance artists were instrumental in using their bodies to challenge fixed perceptions of identity. The corporeality of the body was used as a temporary means to move from the margins to the centre of visibility, with the body becoming a transformative agent, a symbolic bridge between the self and the collective. Mendieta worked outdoors, outside traditional museum and gallery spaces. *Silueta* (1973-1980), was a series of performative actions in which she created outlines of her body directly onto and into the earth that serve as a referent to mark the site. As in Mendieta's works, Faustine's sites appear empty, but are laden with the history and ideologies that produced them. In this way, Faustine's work is closely related to that of Land artist Agnes Denes (b. 1938). For her work *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982), Denes planted a two-acre field of wheat in Battery Park, in Lower Manhattan, across from the Statue of Liberty. *Wheatfield* reminded New Yorkers of the consequences of colonialism on the Lenape's Manahatta island. After the fall harvest, the project was available only through documentary photographs, which provided a trace of the site-specific work.

Faustine relies on a similar technique in *White Shoes*; by photographing each site, she makes her performance more than just a temporary monument. Her indexical presence creates an almost ghostly remnant that recalls the historical presence of human bodies and that, in turn, calls attention to the indexical past of the site. The indexicality of a photograph is balanced by deixis, a term first introduced in linguistics that explains how language is context-dependent.[33] Deixis establishes the point of origin for the referents 'I', 'we', etc. It implies an emptiness that can only be contextualized by the referent. The term has been useful in film and photography theory. *White Shoes* exemplifies the duality of deixis. In the photographs, Faustine is detached from their original time and place, yet her works are pointedly *about* time and place. She, her body, is in dialogue between the real and the performative, past and

present. She represents, but is not the trauma. Her performance is a mediated simulacrum. Georges Didi-Huberman claims that photographs are not a deficient simulacrum but an actual trace of the event.[34] They bear witness to an incident by focusing on the necessity of remembering. And this is precisely what Faustine's *White Shoes* does.

Faustine's sites are heavy with history, even if that history is invisible. In *Like a Pregnant Corpse the Ship Expelled Her Into The Patriarchy*, Faustine lies on the Brooklyn shore on the Atlantic Ocean. She is the monument to the many captives who suffered through the Middle Passage – the 338,000 who arrived on the shores of the United States and those who died en route.[35] Faustine humanises the many women who were thrust into an unfamiliar landscape or who died in a foreign land. She presents only her breasts and legs to the viewers; her face is obscured, with only the bottom of her chin visible. Faustine thus suggests the vulnerability of the women before her through her faceless and exposed nude body and her parted legs.

*Of My Body I Will Make Monuments in Your Honor* was staged in a pre-Revolutionary Dutch cemetery in Brooklyn, where three enslaved persons were buried in unmarked graves. Three full-sized replicas of Faustine's nude body (from the front, back, and side) are placed amongst headstones engraved with the names of early Dutch residents of Brooklyn. The replicas are placed on wooden boxes – actual soapboxes perhaps referring to the symbolism of standing on a soapbox to give a speech – for visibility. They serve as a type of pedestal, raising the images of Faustine even higher than the white seventeenth-century tombstones. The figures are either missing heads or have holes in place of Faustine's face, like a photo stand-in, which are typically found at fairs and other tourist attractions for amusement. For the duration of the exhibition, visitors to the cemetery could place their own heads or faces where Faustine's had been removed adding their own histories to the burial site. Amongst the Dutch graves, *Of My Body* provides a narrative that

enslaved persons were either denied or were erased from the historical narrative of New York City.

In *From Her Body Sprang Their Greatest Wealth*, Faustine stands atop a simple wooden box at 75 Wall Street (Figure 7). The box is a stand-in for the auction block that was at this site in the seventeenth century. Faustine's presence – her uncompromising *presentness* – at these sites of trauma restores agency to the Black body. Black women's forced reproduction became the foundation for generational wealth for white families in the United States – which the title of this work references.

**Figure 7:** Faustine, *From Her Body Sprang Their Greatest Wealth,* 2012. Chromogenic photograph.

For example, in *Not Gone with the Wind*, Faustine stands in front of The Lefferts House, an historical site in Prospect Park that preserves the prominent role the Lefferts family played in Brooklyn history (Figure 8). She assumes the identity of Isabelle, one of the enslaved people who worked for Pieter Lefferts (1645-1704). In *Not Gone with the Wind*,

Faustine deconstructs the stereotype of the black, large-breasted house-slave wearing a kerchief to cover her nappy hair that was universalised through Hattie McDaniel's Mammy in the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind. Gone with the Wind* pivots around the affirmational relationship between slave and owner. The mammy figure was a nineteenth-century construction by white southerners in response to the antislavery moment in the north.[36] In minstrel shows they were broadly painted as asexualized figures happy, contented, and devoted to their white family. The idea of a mammy sought to redeem the relationship of white men to enslaved Black women in which Black women were sexually exploited for commercial gain. As 'Isabelle,' Faustine addresses the romanticized and distorted history of Black women as caretakers and nurturers. The black cast-iron pan in her left hand identifies her as a house 'domestic,' but she gives her mammy autonomy and authority. She has a name and thus an identity. She holds a steady gaze with the viewer. She reveals and claims her 'nappy' hair. White baby shoes are attached to the front of the skirt – signs of babies born into captivity to the financial benefit of the Lefferts family. It was only recently that the Lefferts House began to incorporate the history of those enslaved by the family into their public-facing programs, the stark realities, as exemplified by Faustine, are still missing from the master narrative.

**Figure 8:** *Not Gone with the Wind*, Lefferts House, Brooklyn, 2012. Chromogenic photograph.

In both *From Her Body Sprang Their Greatest Wealth* and *Not Gone with the Wind,* Faustine, with her steady gaze, personalises the history of slavery that is disembodied from the Black bodies that make up that history. Her public actions echo the performative nature of slave auctions. In *From Her Body…*, Faustine's gaze is active. She stands tall, her body juxtaposed against the steel and concrete, creating an image that represents and memorialises the many Black women who passed through the slave markets at the junction of Pearl and Water Streets in Lower Manhattan. As such, her body represents both power and powerlessness. This duality is also implied through her clasped hands that indicate serenity and in spite of the manacle that is attached to left wrist. As a woman, she remains bound to a history of objecthood defined through her productivity in populating the new nation.

After the Atlantic slave trade was abolished in New York in 1827,[37] owners required increased production of human bodies in order to maintain economic stability, thus increasing the value of Black female bodies. Read through this lens, Faustine in *From Her Body* is visible only as an object valued for her monetary worth – what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall calls 'racial capitalism' – as a coveted object for a potential buyer.[38] Her large breasts and wide hips demonstrate her child-bearing ability. Enslaved women also commanded high market value as forced concubines, such as the highly valued 'fancy girls'.[39] Faustine's high heels symbolise the endemic practice of female sexual slavery and control. Heels were originally worn by seventeenth-century aristocratic men in Europe as a way to indicate status through impractical clothing for those who did not work. In the 1630s, women, seeking to masculinize their clothing, adopted the heel. But in the nineteenth century, as the clothing of upper-class men became more practical, women's clothing became increasingly restrictive.[40] The heels that initially signified wealth, became increasingly associated with a gendered performance for the male gaze. High heels shape the calf, thrust and tilt the pelvis forwards,

and push the buttocks out. They limit movement. Within this context, Faustine presents herself as a sexual object, a person with no agency and restricted mobility. She is held captive by the white shoes. But, with her direct and forward gaze, there is no shame in her nudity. She reclaims the hypersexualisation of Black women that is rooted in misogyny and racism.[41]

Unlike in the majority of other images in the *White Shoes* series, in *From Her Body Sprang Their Greatest Wealth*, it is clear that an observer is present. The presence of the taxi reminds the viewer that in New York City, someone is always there. The mostly empty streets and a streetlamp on the left side of the image indicate that the photograph was taken in the early morning hours. In an area typically filled with pedestrians and traffic, only the lone taxi can be seen in the background. The vacant street allows Faustine to stand in the centre of the intersection. The image is almost a representation of Renaissance space: the buildings on either side of Faustine provide the orthogonal lines that draw the eye to her and beyond, farther down into Lower Manhattan and the Financial District.

What does it mean for her Black body to claim space in such a public manner? Her Black, heavy, nude body stands in direct contrast to the tradition of allegorical statues, serving to widen the distance between the Black body and what are commonly assumed to be classical notions of beauty. This construction of racial othering became integral for German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), who argued that the physical beauty of the Greeks was far superior to that of the Egyptians and Africans, 'who had been handicapped by their own physical appearance'.[42] The classical standard for many post–Civil War statues was Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* (discussed above). Her marble body, devoid of the polychromy employed by the Greeks and Romans, shone as the white standard of a noble Greek ideal. There was no place for the Black body historically or visually in the post-war construction of memory and history. The ahistorical narrative of white Greek sculpture

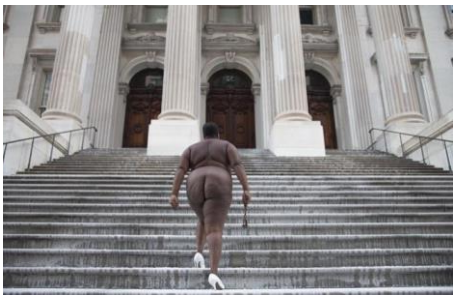
continues to inform white nationalist movements and modern white-identity groups. The connection to a Graeco-Roman classical past legitimises white nationalist goals. Ethno-classicism, particularly in statues raised to the former Confederacy, called for a return to what were perceived as authentic classical ideas in order to represent national regeneration. The precedent lay in the emphasis on classical rhetoric in the United States during the colonial and early national periods.[43] In using her own body to replace the classical statues that memorialise the Confederacy, Faustine subverts that figural tradition.

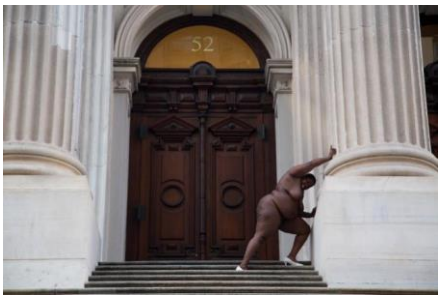
Faustine's work is reminiscent of the photographs of Saartjie (the diminutive of Sarah) Baartman, a Khoekhoe woman exhibited throughout the nineteenth century. Her work also owes a debt to artist Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953), whose series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-1996) uses thirty-three archival photographs that present Black people as an exotic Other. A front-facing portrait of an older Black woman becomes *Some Said You Were the Spitting Image of the Evil*; *And Their Daughter* presents a Black woman holding a white baby; a torso of a Black man is labelled *Anything But What You Were-Ha.* The titles, which are placed directly across the image of each person, underscore the white lens under which they are scrutinised. A photograph of a Congolese man named Renty, the subject of *Anything But What You Were-Ha*, is a replica of daguerreotype from 1850 collected by Louis Agassiz, part of a series of fifteen daguerreotype plates of seven enslaved people. Consisting of standing subjects who are fully nude, presented from the side, front, and rear, the images are studies of difference. Because of the indexical properties of photographs – the trace of an actual existence – photography appears to be entirely objective. Faustine, however, by placing herself at the historical sites of the slave trade, moves beyond the white gaze of Agassiz and becomes both object and subject. *White Shoes* thus has 'double indexicality' because Faustine is both the referent and the photographer.

In *Over My Dead Body*, Faustine first climbs the steps of New York City Hall (Figure 9). Her dark figure, dwarfed by the Ionic columns, contrasts starkly with the white classical facade. In another image, she stands at the top of the stairs, looking south towards Lower Manhattan. City Hall is located in one of the oldest settled portions of New York City in what was formerly a public commons. Faustine's choice of this particular site is multi-layered. City Hall is located on a small triangular parcel of land bordered by Chambers Street to the north, and Broadway and Park Row to the west and east, respectively. Just north of Chambers Street is a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century burial ground for Black Americans. A 1901 map notes that 'paupers, criminals, and American Patriots under British rule' were also buried there.[44] In 2007, a memorial was dedicated to the Black Americans who were integral to the history of New York City. American cities, from Atlanta to New York City, still use buildings, roads, and ports that were built by enslaved people. And these centuries-old relics of slavery still support the economy of the United States.[45] Black Americans, since Reconstruction, have been conscious of the ways the material landscape has been shaped by Black labour while, simultaneously, they were systematically erased from these landscapes. The African Burial Museum, part of the African Burial Ground National Monument that was created to acknowledge the labour of Black residents, estimates that roughly 15,000 enslaved and free Black people were buried at this site.[46] In 1741, New York City had the second largest population of enslaved persons outside of Charleston, South Carolina. The memorial, located between City Hall and the New York City federal courts, highlights the symbolic role of these two institutions in shaping a one-sided history of New York.

*Over My Dead Body* challenges the prevailing cultural history of City Hall. Until 2021, a thirty-metre statue of Thomas Jefferson was located in the chamber of the New York City Council.[47] Because of Jefferson's role as an owner of enslaved persons, the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus agitated

for the statue's removal and relocation to the New-York Historical Society. In *They Tagged the Land with Institutions and Trophies from Their Conquests and Rapes*, Faustine tries to destabilise a white hegemonic history by attempting to topple one of the columns at the entrance. The composition centres the old wooden doors that mark the entrance to City Hall between two of the white stone pillars (Figure 10). She uses her body to counterbalance the symmetry of the photograph. With her high-heel-clad feet placed on different steps, she leans in and pushes against the column on the right, seeming to strain against the futility of her efforts.






(L) **Figure 9:** Faustine, *Over My Dead Body,* 2012. Chromogenic photograph.

(R) **Figure 10:** Faustine, *They Tagged the Land with Institutions and Trophies from Their Conquests and Rapes,* 2012. Chromogenic photograph.

In another photograph, titled '*… a thirst for compleat freedom … had been her only motive for absconding*', taken at 26 Wall Street in Lower Manhattan, Faustine calls attention to the important role George Washington played in the public life of New York City (Figure 11). A statue of Washington is located at Federal Hall, elevated on a stone plinth and erected in honour of his 1789 inauguration as the first president of the United States.[48] A self-guided tour, offered by GPSmyCity, provides the history of this location and others connected to 'Washington's greatest military trials and political triumphs'.[49] Numerous tours, both

private and public, trace his impact on the city. Faustine, however, reminds us that Washington was an owner of enslaved people. During his journey to New York from Mount Vernon, Virginia, for the inauguration, he was accompanied by seven enslaved persons. For this piece, Faustine faces the bronze statue of Washington, her back to the viewer. Wearing a long white skirt, she becomes a proxy for Ona Judge, the enslaved woman who served as Martha Washington's maid. The title of this photograph quotes the words Judge reportedly used to describe her motivation for escaping in 1796: 'a thirst for compleat [sic] freedom'.[50]

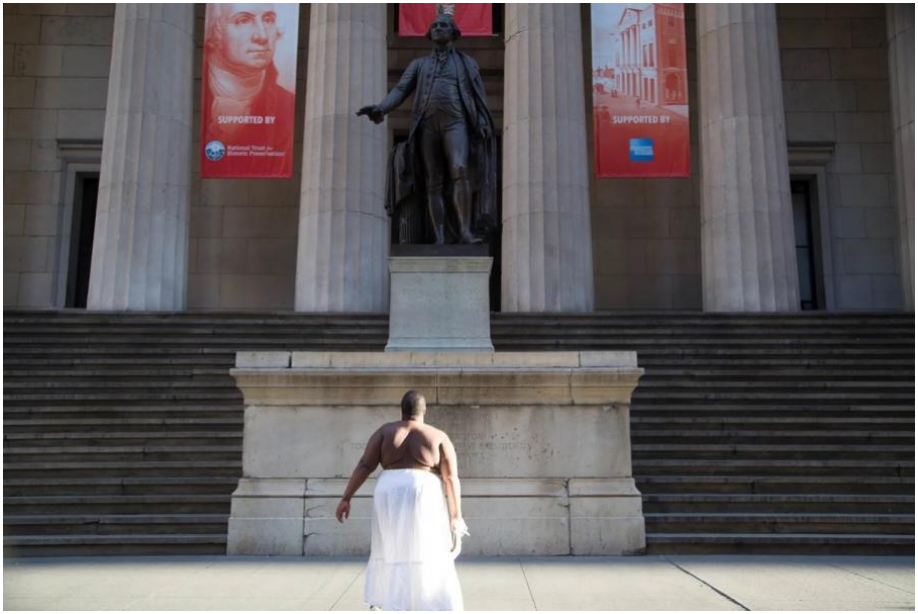



**Figure 11:** Faustine, *'... a thirst for compleat freedom ... had been her only motive for absconding',* 2012. Chromogenic photograph.

## Conclusion

Through a comparison between the bodies of those freed Black people as they have been depicted in monuments after the Civil War and Faustine's body, we can explore the links between colonialism, racism, and capitalism. Her work calls attention to how the financial gains attained through the exploitation of the Black body remain visible in the landscape of the United States. The body is laden with meaning; it is always in view and on view. By inscribing her own body into New York City – whether historic landmarks, institutions, or sites of hidden history – Faustine confronts dominant, predominantly white national narratives, highlighting the absence of Black bodies and Black history in those narratives. Faustine resurrects the people who were subjected to physical and structural violence. She demonstrates the violence of being denied humanity and the violence of historical erasure by turning her body into its own kind of monument, however impermanent – made of flesh, not marble.

Faustine's *White Shoes* series offers a means of challenging national narratives and intervening in the commemorative practices that support them. Wilson's unrealised *E Pluribus Unum* offers another, through its subversive engagement with a 1902 national – or at least state-inspired patriotic – monument. His replication of the figure of the emancipated Black man depicted in the monument, however, disturbed those who advocate the outright removal of racial tropes from public space. Such calls are part of a broader movement for racial justice and reckoning, which includes efforts to raze problematic monuments, such as those to the Confederacy. Both Wilson and Faustine suggest a different approach to addressing the racist history of the United States, one that involves confronting, adding to, re-appropriating, or recontextualising the built environment.

As if in answer to bell hooks' call for a new visualisation of a Black body politic, Faustine's work challenges white patriarchal dominance through mediated images of Black bodies by creating presence where there is absence. Monument-building is a living process, in some sense always unfinished; no matter how much a monument may appear to be eternal and unchanging, its meaning is always evolving as its viewers bring new concerns and understandings to it. James Young emphasises that 'memory-work' is a way of 'working-through', which includes a sense of our changing relationship to particular memories.[51] Faustine's *White Shoes* series, in particular, is a powerful example of how one might 'work through' the fraught historical realities of the United States.

## Endnotes

[1] R. Ray and A.M. Perry provide a summary of the case for reparations in 'Why we need reparations for Black Americans' <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/bigideas/why-we-need-reparations-for-black-americans/> [accessed 1/21/22]. See also T.-N. Coates, 'The case for reparations', in: *The Atlantic* (June 2014) <

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/ > [accessed 2/2 2022].

[2] See R. Robinson, *The debt: What America owes to Blacks* (New York, 2000), and M. Martin & M. Yaquinto (eds.), *Redress for historical injustices in the United States: On reparations for slavery, Jim Crow, and their legacies* (Durham, 2007).

[3] bell hooks, *Black looks: Race and repression* (Boston, 1992).

[4] K. Savage, *Standing soldiers, kneeling slaves* (Princeton, 1997).

[5] Savage, *Standing soldiers, kneeling slaves*.

[6] J. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the twentieth century* (Princeton, 1992).

[7] J. Young, *Textures of memory* (New Haven, 1994), 15.

[8] K. Cox, *No common ground: Confederate monuments as the ongoing fight for racial justice* (Chapel Hill, 2021), 5.

[9] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was preceded by five attempts to address state-sponsored segregation in the public-school system. The Brown case was the name given to five separate cases that were consolidated before being heard by the US Supreme Court. Brown was a cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement when it established that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

[10] Cox, *No common ground*, 6.

[11] F. Murray, *Emancipation and the freed in American sculpture: A study in interpretation* (1916), 2-3. Smithsonian books online. https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/emancipationfree00murr [accessed 4/9/21].

[12] Examples are compiled on the blog *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture*, established by Stephen Railton and the University of Virginia, on the page 'The Greek Slave', <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sentimnt/grslvhp.html> [accessed 4/11/2021].

[13] J. Jarves *The Art Idea* (1864), 281, quoted in Murray, *Emancipation and the freed in American sculpture*, 14.

[14] C. Caffin, *American Masters of Sculpture* (1903), 44 quoted in Murray, *Emancipation and the freed in American sculpture*, 14.

[15] Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (1882), 581 quoted in Murray, *Emancipation and the freed in American sculpture*, 15.

[16] C. Eliot, 'The Lincoln emancipation statue', in: *The Journal of negro history* 29/4 (October 1944), 473.

[17] Quoted in J. White & S. Sandage, 'What Frederick Douglass had to say about monuments', in: *Smithsonian Magazine* (30 June 2020), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-frederick-douglass-had-say-about-monuments-180975225/> [accessed 14/1/22].

[18] T. Bullock, 'Remove Emancipation Memorial/Freedom Statue', n.d. <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/remove-the-emancipation-

statue?fbclid=IwAR3nrgQtPNvMmsD20XHbvHxykWyqwQhI4lSPsE7rVzK_zKgrt1NtFWSvpZ4 > [accessed 12/12/2020].

[19] Bullock, 'Remove Emancipation Memorial/Freedom Statue'.

[20] A. Kavi, 'Activists push for removal of statue of freed slave kneeling before Lincoln', in: *New York Times*, (27 June 2020 (updated 29 December 2020)), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/us/politics/lincoln-slave-statue-emancipation.html> [accessed 12/12/20].

[21] C. Guerra, 'Boston Art Commission votes to remove Emancipation Memorial from Park Square', in: *WBUR* (20 June 2020), <https://www.wbur.org/news/2020/06/30/boston-art-commission-lincoln-emancipation-memorial> [accessed 12/12/2020].

[22] J. Elsner, 'Iconoclasm and the preservation of memory', in: R.S. Nelson and M.R. Olin (eds.), *Monuments and memory, made and unmade* (Chicago, 2003), 209-232.

[23] The memorial was designed by Ed Dwight (b. 1933)

[24] D. Upton, *What can and can't be said* (New Haven, 2015), 15.

[25] Designed by Rudolf Schwartz (1866 Vienna–1912 Indianapolis, Indiana).

[26] K. Savage, 'E Pluribus Unum,' (Published 25 April 2011) < http://www.kirksavage.pitt.edu/?p=180> [accessed 14/12/21].

[27] For a summary of all of the criticism Wilson faced, see M. Labode, 'Unsafe ideas, public art, and *E Pluribus Unum*: An interview with Fred Wilson', in: *Indiana Magazine of History* 108/4 (2012), 386.

[28] L. Robinson, 'Sculpture is appalling' (part 2), *Indianapolis Recorder* (24 September 2010), <https://indianapolisrecorder.com/d22cf9f9-c01d-5e6d-a787-96fc64a1f952/>[accessed 12/12/21].

[29] Robinson, 'Sculpture' [accessed 12/12/21].

[30] Dunlap, 'Evidence of a burial ground is discovered in East Harlem', in: *New York Times*, (21 January 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/nyregion/remains-discovered-at-an-east-harlem-site-thought-to-be-an-african-burial-ground.html> [accessed 4/2/22]. In 2010, New York's State Historic Preservation Office recommended

that the Elmendorf Reformed Church be placed on the state and national registers of historic places to document Harlem's colonial past.

[31] Savage, *Standing soldiers, kneeling slaves*, 210.

[32] Fluxus was an international community of artists that emphasized process over the finished product. The origins lie in the experimental music of John Cage (1912-1992).

[33] See S. Levinson, 'Deixis', in: L. Horn (ed.), *The handbook of pragmatics* (Malden, 2004). Levinson considers deixis as co-extensive with indexicality.

[34] G. Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris, 2003).

[35] Twelve and a half million Africans were forcibly transported to the New World; only 10.7 survived. The majority of those captured were sent to the Caribbean and South America. See H.L. Gates, Jr, for America's Black Holocaust Museum, a historical and memorial museum located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, <https://www.abhmuseum.org/how-many-africans-were-really-taken-to-the-u-s-during-the-slave-trade/> [accessed 12/1/22].

[36] P.A. Turner, *Ceramic uncles & celluloid mammies: Black images and their influence on culture* (New York, 1994).

[37] Slavery was officially abolished in stages in the northern states between 1783 (Massachusetts) and 1858 (New Hampshire).

[38] J. D. Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past', in: *The Journal of American History*, 91/4 (2005), 1243.

[39] B. Stevenson, 'Introduction: Women, slavery, and historical research', in: *The Journal of African Historical Research*, 92/1 (2007), 3.

[40] E. Semmelhack, *Heights of Fashion: A History of the Elevated Shoe* (Reading, 2008).

[41] A.F. Benard, 'Colonizing Black female bodies within patriarchal capitalism: Feminist and human rights perspectives', in: *Sexualization, Media, & Society* 2/4 (2016), 3.

[42] Winckelmann, paraphrased in H. Honour, 'Studies', in: D. Bindman & H.L. Gates, Jr, (eds.), *The image of the Black in Western art*, vol. 4: *From the American Revolution to World War I*, pt. 2: *Black models and white Myths* (Cambridge, 2012), 14.

[43] See J. Farrell, 'Above all Greek, above all Roman fame', in: *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18/3 (2011), 415-436.

[44] E.H. Hall, 'A Landmark Map of City Hall Park, New York', in: *An appeal for the preservation of City Hall Park New York with a brief history of the park* (New York, 1910), 20-21.

[45] J. Inwood & A. Brand, 'Slave-built infrastructure still creates wealth in the US, suggesting reparations should cover past harms and current value of slavery,' in: *The Conversation* (5 May 2021), <https://theconversation.com/slave-built-infrastructure-still-creates-wealth-in-us-suggesting-reparations-should-cover-past-harms-and-current-value-of-slavery-153969> [accessed 1/25/22].

[46] https://www.nps.gov/afbg/index.htm [accessed 14/1/22].

[47] The statue is a replica of a bronze statue of Jefferson by Pierre-Jean David D'Anger. It was commissioned for the United States Capitol Rotunda in Washington, DC, in 1933, by Uriah Levy, the first Jewish commodore of the US Navy. Levy wanted to commemorate Jefferson's advocacy of religious freedom in the armed forces. According to Louise Mirrer, president of the New-York Historical Society, the museum intends to place the statue on the ground floor to illustrate 'the principal contradiction of our founding ideals'. J. Mays & S. Small, 'Jefferson Statue Will Be Removed from N.Y.C. Council Chambers', in: *The New York Times* (18 October 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/18/nyregion/thomas-jefferson-statue-ny-city-council.html> [accessed 2 February 2022].

[48] John Quincy Adams Ward, George Washington, 1883, bronze.

[49] https://www.gpsmycity.com/tours/george-washingtons-new-york-6608.html [accessed 7/1/22].

[50] This phrase was taken from a correspondence between George Washington and Joseph Whipple, the customs collector of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. 'Letter from George Washington and Joseph Whipple, 29 November 1796, transcribed, "From George Washington to Joseph Whipple, 28 November 1796," *Founders Online,* National Archives, last modified February 21, 2017, http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99–01–02–00037. [accessed 17/11/21].

[51] J. Geddes and J. Young, 'Interview with James E. Young. "Memorials seem to remember just about everything except their own coming into being"', in: *The*

*Hedgehog Review Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture,* The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (2007) https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-uses-of-the-past/articles/interview-with-james-e-young [accessed 7 July 2021].

# Nationalising Scorched Earth – Memory and Destruction of Monuments from Vukovar to Knin

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Research has often focused on Croatian memorialisation processes in specific places like Bleiburg and Jasenovac, controversial places during and after World War II. This article employs another view and elaborates on the destruction and removal, as well as the recent restoration of monuments and reconstruction of sacred architecture. It examines current memory processes in places once in the Republic of Serbian Krajina (1991-1995), from Vukovar to Knin. It stresses the different roles between state-organised and private commemorations in these historically multi-ethnic and -religious areas. The paper addresses problems like the demolition of monuments not fitting into the state narrative and analyses various historical processes that instigated the (re-)use of revisionist and mostly politically tolerated symbols and inscriptions on monuments and sacred architecture. With attention to the latter, it specifically deals with the reconstruction of a Catholic and Christian-Orthodox church in the Lika region. The research connects historical and anthropological approaches and contributes to the interdisciplinary field of memory studies.

**Keywords:** Croatia, Croatian War of Independence, Nationalism, Memory, Monuments.

## Introduction

Croatia's historical metanarrative of the thousand-year struggle for independence has become a key element in nation formation since 1991.[1] However, the role of (national) self-determination linked with the reconstruction of monuments and sacred architecture in memory-making within multi-ethnic and -religious areas remains a relatively under-investigated dimension of sociological and anthropological studies.

What makes these regions worth mentioning is their hundred years long history as border regions, which left a multi-ethnic and -religious legacy still waiting for its historical reappraisal. Along the former Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier, in today's Croatian Adriatic hinterland and eastern Croatia, the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995) left its indelible mark. This also included the very sensitive multicultural space. For the process of nation-building, the presence of a certain minority does not fit the metanarrative. Correspondingly, as Robert Bevan puts it: 'The destruction of the cultural artefacts of an enemy people or nation as a means of dominating, terrorizing, dividing or eradicating […].'[2] 'If there is no suitable past, it can always be invented. The past legitimises. The past gives a more glorious background to a present that doesn't have much to show for itself.'[3]

With this in mind, nationalist groups consider multi-ethnic (-cultural) coexistence as threatening and obstructing the nation-building process.[4] The idea of nation-building followed the principle of 'one state=one nation=one language',[5] and regarded multilingualism as an exception. Hence, after the war in the 1990s, they demolished partisan monuments, which had inscriptions in several languages like Croatian, Serbian, Hungarian and Ukrainian. Over half of the antifascist monuments were demolished without legal sanction.[6] At that time, authorities erected new plaques and monuments commemorating the victimhood of

Independent Croatia (1941-1945) alluding to communist crimes. The use of a Croat-centred self-victimising language denies or silences the existing ethnic and religious diversity. Additionally, they manipulate historical events with its inscriptions and, thus, successfully establish a metanarrative in the public discourse.

This study concentrates on artefacts in (former) multi-ethnic and -religious places within the former borders of the Serbian Krajina (1992-1995) in Croatia, a region with its own conflicted remembrance.[7] It draws on research conducted in villages once along the historical Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier and which before 1991 bore a multi-ethnic and -religious stamp. In this context, a striking moment is the destruction and removal as well as the recent erection and/or restoration of monuments and reconstruction of sacred architecture.

I aim to follow various historical processes that instigated the (re-)use of revisionist and mostly politically tolerated symbols and inscriptions on monuments and sacred architecture. This research connects historical and anthropological approaches and fills a gap within the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, offering a heuristic lens that considers both distant (multicultural Military Frontier) and recent history (the 1990s war).

Contrary to existing research, my method looks at how nationalising and strengthening tradition(s) influence iconography and language. With attention to these factors, I will show that these processes lead to establishing revisionist narratives. During my field research, I gathered information on over 700 monuments in roughly 550 towns and villages. I localised the monuments with the help of local newspapers mentioning commemorations or by visiting places which suffered from military actions. I photographed all monuments and created a corpus with GPS-data, the inscriptions and symbols. The monuments appear in a variety of places. For example, in parks, central squares, streets, along the roads,

cemeteries or remote locations, often a significant place where an incident happened.

So far, there were several attempts to discuss the destruction of partisan monuments and post-Yugoslav memory politics in Croatia. As Stef Jansen postulates, memory might not be based on what happened during the war, but on what the post-conflict administration and decision-makers perceive as politically convenient to tell a story about.[8] Jansen researched the early stage of the memorialisation processes after 1995.[9] He highlights the enormous discrepancy between the remembrance of Croats and Serbs in former Serbian Krajina and provides evidence for memories being selective and nationally exclusive by reconstructing specific historical events.

The remembrance practices and transitional justice in the Balkans have been quite well analysed by Jelena Subotić.[10] Further specific research referring to war narratives in Croatia have already been outlined by Vjeran Pavlaković,[11] Tamara Banjeglav,[12] and Janine Clark.[13] The latter two have contributed to commemoration practises and the erection of monuments in Vukovar.[14]

Other relevant research has been done by Ljiljana Radonić.[15] She has pointed out the dangerous and strengthening remembrance practices within the far-right movements in Croatia, denying atrocities during World War II and the Holocaust.

The legitimising processes, which are inextricably linked to political power, are another key point. Political authority strives to delimit the range of possible interpretations of the past and control the process through which such interpretations become politically and socially viable and legitimate. Nationalising comprises various factors. For instance, Martin Gegner and Bart Zino include war as one of its processes and postulate: 'The main arguments are that war mostly mobilises

identities, mentalities and emotions. Therefore, remembrance provides legitimacy to political systems and underscores territorial claims.'[16] Hobsbawm and Ranger see tradition as a key, as it constructs versions of 'the past', which ends in a unified common culture. Symbols are part of this constructed past. According to Anthony Cohen, they are important for the production of space.[17] Certain communities and groups perceive the symbols as their own and use them to strengthen their In-group values. Arjun Appadurai put it in a similar way, saying that the dualism 'majority—minority' is a recent invention and aroused from the so-called 'anxiety of incompleteness.[18]' These remarks significantly provide a profound understanding and the basis for this paper.

## Historical Outline

To get a better understanding of the situation in the researched area, I will shortly outline several important historical events. The first and crucial one was the establishment of the Habsburg Military Frontier, which lasted from 1521 to 1881 in its longest extension.[19] Throughout history, the Frontier had been a refuge for Catholics and Orthodox Christians from the Ottoman Empire. It also attracted colonists from the Habsburg Empire to work the fields in exchange for tax relief. In 1702, after the defeat of the Ottomans, the Habsburg authorities established the Slavonian Military Frontier,[20] which then formed a continuous border from the Adriatic coast through central Croatia to the Danube river. Colonising the Frontier region resulted in a multi-ethnic and -religious territory.

However, only from the mid-nineteenth century onwards did the authorities introduce a categorisation of ethnicities.[21] However, the ethnic identities were limited to the educated elites.[22] By the end of the nineteenth century, the former Frontier regions consisted mostly of

Serbs except for eastern Croatia. In the latter there were also Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Jews, Slovaks and Ukrainians.

In the twentieth century, two events disturbed the conviviality. Firstly, World War II and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. Secondly, the Croatian War of Independence.

The latter put the new Croatian government in a difficult position of how to deal with its own actions during World War II, its situation as part of Yugoslavia and how to memorialise its newly acquired independence. For Croatia's first president, Franjo Tudjman, there was only one way to accomplish his vision.[23] To maintain his political legitimacy and to frame Croatia's 1000-year-old foundation narrative, he decided to break radically with the Yugoslav past and rehabilitate Croatia's collaboration with the Nazis.[24]

The return of ethnic phrasing has also been beneficial for Tudjman. In the 1990s war, terms like Chetniks and Ustashe (synonymously standing for Serbs and Croats), reappeared.[25] Besides that, further newly-coined terms, like 'Serbo-' and 'Yugo-Communism', delegitimizing the Tito-regime and implying that Serbs would overtake Croatia, were used.

The two military Operations *Bljesak* (Flash) and *Oluja* (Storm) in May and August 1995, spelled the end of the Serbian Krajina, which not only vanished almost the last traces of the Military Frontier and its multicultural landscape, but it also entailed an enormous win for the Croatian government. The regions of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Syrmia remained under UN-protection, but returned peacefully to Croatia in January 1998.

Croatia's memory politics is no coincidence. Since 1991, Franjo Tudjman's (1922-1999) party HDZ (Croatian Democratic Party) has only been out of government between 2000-2003 and 2011-2015. In 2006,

the Croatian parliament adopted the 'Declaration on Operation Storm' and used it to make the heroic winner narrative official. The Declaration plays down the committed crimes by calling the victims innocent and powerless civilians, who 'usually get killed during such actions.'[26] The Croatian army and paramilitary groups were involved in committing crimes against civilian victims who were mostly older Serbs who could not or did not want to flee.

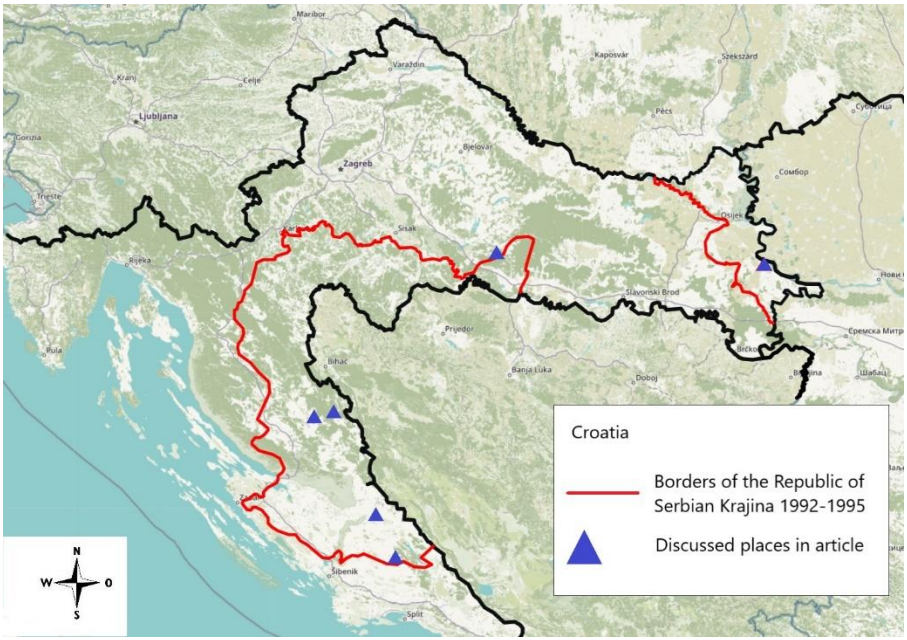


**Figure 1:** © OpenStreetMap contributors, edited by the author.

## The water tower in Vukovar

The eastern Croatian town of Vukovar is most known for its shoe manufacturer, Borovo, and the water tower, which is standing at the

banks of the Danube river. Vukovar is in a remarkably ethnically and religiously mixed area, including (besides Croats and Serbs) Ukrainians, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Slovaks and others. However, the town is also known as 'grad heroja' (town of heroes). It results from the three months Yugoslav People's Army and Serb paramilitary siege between August and November 1991. Consequently, it left the town destroyed and the water tower became a symbol for its victim-based narrative.

In the late 1990s, local authorities had the idea to musealise Vukovar, leaving the city in its destitute state after its peaceful reintegration in 1998. However, despite abandoning this idea, the war became the focal point of the new political and national identity promoted in Vukovar's public space.[27] The authorities reinforced this vision by erecting several monuments and memorial museums marking former frontlines. According to my findings, there are at least twelve monuments dedicated to the Croatian War of Independence and additionally seven memorial museums in Vukovar and its periphery. The most important ones are the mass grave and Memorial Centre at Ovčara, Memorial cemetery of the Homeland War victims, Memorial Centre of the Homeland War and the Memorial House of the Croatian Defenders on Trpinja road. As Tamara Banjeglav puts it: 'This act of erecting memorial sculptures encircling the city can be seen as the final stage in the creation of what Naef calls a "museum city", a term used to describe "urban centres frozen by their heritagisation".'[28]

Recently, Vukovar remembered for the 30th time its destruction on 18 November 1991. Dejan Jović calls this form of memorialisation a 'war for interpretation of the war.'[29] According to Jović, the process of building a long-lasting peace in Croatia was met with resistance from those in whose best interest it was for the war to never finish. Considering the period from 2014 and Vukovar's political changes, Jović's claim certainly proves to be true for Vukovar.

Since 2014, Ivan Penava (leader of the right-wing populist party 'Domovinski pokret' (Homeland Movement)) is the mayor of Vukovar. He strongly pushes his nationalist agenda to strengthen Vukovar's narrative of suffering. In February 2020, the Croatian government passed a new law, which lists Vukovar as 'a special place of homeland piety'. Consequently, the town erected several almost six-metres-high sculptures on every road entering Vukovar. The inscriptions read that 'one is entering Vukovar, the place of special homeland piety'. The sculptures are shaped as the letter 'V', which stands for Vukovar, but also as the symbol for victory, regularly used by the Croatian forces during the 1990s war.[30]

While there are several articles on memory and memorialisation in Vukovar, I will specifically elaborate on the newest development regarding the water tower. Recently, it became another addition to the several already existing documentation centres in and around Vukovar. Remarkably, the total cost of reconstruction was 46 million Kuna (approx. 6,1 million Euro). Only seven million came from the government, the rest from private donations. On the roof there is a circle with all the seven thousand donator's names and a small plaque with information on Ivan (Marko) Ivanika who represents one of the town's 'heroes'. In 1991, he had been climbing up the tower every day to raise the Croatian flag, until a grenade shell hit him on 5 November 1991. He survived the injury, but eventually died under unknown circumstances. His remains were found in a mass grave near Ilok in 2005. Under the roof, there is a tiny exhibition on six TV screens showing Vukovar's siege.

After the transformation of the water tower into a monument and exhibition centre, authorities also introduced 18 November as a national holiday in Croatia, which resembled 'only' a memorial day before. [31] The water tower is an unusual example for monuments, as before 1991, it simply functioned as a water supply tower. Only after 1998, it became

such an important symbol for Croatian politics. Since 1998, Vukovar's authorities and veterans' organisations have been continuously nationalising the town, altering public space and its concurrent ideologies.

Despite the efforts, authorities could not entirely erase partisan or Serbian artefacts from the public space. The partisan Memorial Park Dudik, erected by famous sculptor Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010), is a commemoration site for partisans killed during World War II. While heavily damaged during the 1990s war, authorities planned to demolish it after the war and transform the space into a football field. Yet it did not happen, because partisan veterans' organisations successfully lobbied to maintain the memorial park. It remains in a decayed[32] state, although still used every second Saturday in May for a commemoration organised by the anti-fascist and veterans' and Serbian minority organisation of Croatia.[33]

The second site relates to the 1990s war. It is the so-called 'groblje šajkača' (šajkača cemetery) next to the Christian-Orthodox cemetery.[34] They named it like this, because of the hats on the graves. Erected on 18 November 1992 on a private property, it remains a controversial spot on Vukovar's map. While Serbs celebrated 'Vukovar's liberation' until 1995 on that specific date, Croats remembered it and still do as the 'fall of Vukovar'. Meanwhile, the hats were removed from the graves. Nonetheless, the site is actively used as a commemoration site by the Serbian minority political party SDSS, sparking further controversies by Croatian War of Independence veterans' organisations.[35] To not interfere with the large-scale Croatian commemorations in Vukovar on 18 November, the Serb minority organisation commemorates in a small clandestine service on 17 November.[36]

To summarise, Vukovar's nationalising process is rather marked by erecting new monuments than by destruction. Namely, the

reconstruction of the town's symbol, the water tower, is a noteworthy transformation of a former utility object into a museum. Consequently, it strengthens the victim-narrative with its exhibition and its preserved 'damaged look'. Nevertheless, the 'šajkača' cemetery and Dudik memorial park prove the divergent commemoration practises. While at Dudik and 'šajkača' the Serb minority political party SDSS (often together with Croatia's Serbian minority organisation) is organising commemorations, they do not take part in other, Croat veterans' or state-organised events.[37] Many high-ranking Croatian politicians attend the latter events in Vukovar and consequently not the SDSS organised ones. Given these points, it evidently shows how Croatian politicians in charge pursue their goal to strengthen national identity and distance themselves from any Serb-related and/or partisan commemorations.

## Memorial Park Trokut

The next example illustrates the divergence and the dealing with Yugoslav heritage in Western Slavonia. It is quite similar to Vukovar's Dudik memorial park, as it shows the destruction of a national Yugoslav monument and, at the same time, construction a new 1990s war monument adjacent to the ruined partisan monument. The location is halfway between Pakrac and Novska on the E47 highway. During Yugoslav times, it had the name 'Spomen Park Trokut' (Memorial Park Trokut). During World War II and the Croatian War of Independence, several military actions took place in this area. Towards the last battles in April 1945, over 650 soldiers from the 21st Serbian partisan division lost their lives while liberating Western Slavonia from the Independent State of Croatia.[38] In 1961, the regime erected a six-meter tall and fifteen-meter-wide monument to honour these soldiers. Additionally, the administration registered it as a national Yugoslav monument in 1973.[39] Hence, it showed the importance of the battle to the regime.

In 1991, this place became a focal point again. The memorial park found itself exactly at the Serbian Krajina border. On 19 November 1991, Croatian forces started Operation 'Orkan' (Hurricane) to take control of Serb-controlled parts of Western Slavonia. During the operations, the partisan monument had been destroyed, leaving only the pedestal. Then, in 2009, the authorities decided to erect a new, prestigious monument dedicated to 337 Croatian soldiers from the 1990s war. For this purpose, they commissioned the famous Croatian architect Branko Silađin (*1936) to design it and place it next to the former partisan site.

In 2017, this place received further attention for a commemorating plaque that was moved from Jasenovac to the memorial park. The controversy is sparked by the use of the highly controversial Ustasha greeting *za dom spremni* (for the homeland, ready!), which is on the plaque. This phrase has been used during the time of the Independent State of Croatia. Not only is it a comparable greeting to *Heil Hitler!* or *Sieg Heil!*, but authorities and Jasenovac survivor organisations considered its previous location as inappropriate as it is known for the most notorious concentration camp in South-East Europe. The reason HOS placed the plaque in Jasenovac is that all unit members died in or near Jasenovac between 1991-1995.

The Croatian paramilitary group *Hrvatske Obrambene Snage* (Croatian Defence Forces (HOS)), which regularly uses revisionist symbols, authored this memorial plaque. The group uses the same abbreviation (HOS) as the *Hrvatske Oružane Snage* (Croatian Armed Forces) during the Independent State of Croatia. The plaque is dedicated to eleven members of the Croatian Defence Forces, 1st 'Ante Paradžik' brigade. They named the unit after the right-wing politician and founder of the Croatian Party of Rights and the Croatian Defence Forces, Ante Paradžik (1943-1991). During World War II, Paradžik's father was also a HOS-member.

Remarkable is the organisation's logo, which is similarly assembled as the coat of arms of the Independent State of Croatia. Instead of using the framed Ustasha 'U', they replaced it with the historical Croatian shield. The frame comprises almost the same Croatian interlace as used by the Independent State of Croatia with just minor adjustments like the rounded-up edges.

**Figure 2:** Coat of arms of Independent State of Croatia. Creative Commons.


**Figure 3:** The HOS-plaque in Trokut, photo by the author. October 2021.

Then again, the issue with the salute *za dom spremni* is that it is not explicitly banned by law in Croatia. However, Article 39 of the Croatian constitution says that 'any call for or incitement to war or use of violence, to national, racial or religious hatred, or any form of intolerance shall be prohibited and is punishable by law.'[40] Remarkably, the Constitutional Court of Croatia has frequently upheld decisions of the lower court's ruling, treating the salute as an offense against the public order and incitement to hatred.[41]

In fact, there is another controversy involving this site. Not only has the plaque been damaged several times, but also led to police surveillance. It included a police car watching the plaque twenty-four hours a day, which led to further discussions. During my field research in early 2018, I witnessed a police car overseeing this place. During my 2021 visit, I observed how the memorial park has now been under video surveillance (See fig. 4).

This example illustrates the value of a contested memorial plaque, which even needs to be protected by the police. This is certainly a unique phenomenon within the researched areas. Another notable fact is that the authorities put so much effort into assembling the monument, but

**Figure 4:** Memorial Park Trokut. In the foreground, the HOS-plaque. In the background, the new 1990s monument. The ruined partisan monument is behind the trees on the left (not visible). Photo by the author, October 2021.

left it with no information panels, thus excluding any visitor from knowledge about the events.

The memorial park also illustrates how the Serbian community cares for partisan sites. After the memorial park gained that much attention in 2017, the Serb National Council from Pakrac cleared the partisan's monument site, bringing it back to memory.[42] During that time, other partisan monuments in (former) Serb-majority villages in this area underwent reconstruction as well. This includes the nearby villages Bujavica, Korita and Jagma. In most cases, the restoration includes the addition of an Orthodox cross shaped in Byzantine tradition. The 2011 restored partisan monument in Bujavica comprises a metal cross, which is rather rare. Usually, this kind of cross is chiselled above the inscriptions. The restoration also brings minor changes to the (Yugoslav) inscriptions. While partisan monuments used phrases including ´fight against Fascism´, the restored monuments often changed it into ´fight against the Ustasha-regime´, clearly naming the perpetrator. Moreover, before the break-up of Yugoslavia, none of the partisan monuments had a cross. In other words, these slight changes on the partisan monuments show the remembrance shift and religious influences. It shifted from a whole-Yugoslav remembrance to a local, religiously shaped commemoration practise.

As can be seen, the memorial park Trokut is an exceptional example comprising two sites - a partisan monument and a lavish and costly 1990s war monument. Given these points, there is a divergent remembrance practise between Croatian veterans' organisations and Croatian Serb associated organisations. The former mostly memorialises the Croatian War of Independence, while the latter strongly maintains partisan heritage sites and monuments. Even though the area around the memorial park Trokut is thinly inhabited since the 1995 Operation Flash, both local veterans' and Croatian Serb organisations vigorously maintain

and/or erect new monuments. This is compelling evidence of nationalising scorched earth.

## Sacred architecture in Donji Lapac and Udbina

The next examples deal with the reconstruction of sacred architecture and its impact on memory in Croatia's Lika region. I will show the reconstruction of the Serbian Orthodox church in Donji Lapac and the Roman Catholic church in Udbina. Both small towns are twenty-five kilometres away from each other and its churches share a similar history.

After being destroyed during World War II, the Orthodox community recently rebuilt the church in Donji Lapac, the county with the highest percentage of Serbs in Croatia.[43] It is noteworthy that the construction works already began in June 1993, during the time of the Serbian Krajina. However, the church could not be reconstructed on its original site, because Yugoslav authorities constructed an administrative building on it. Therefore, the new church stands at the opposite site of its previous location. Another notable fact is that the reconstruction did not adapt the originally used architectural eighteenth-century baroque style, but a neo-Byzantine style referring to architecture in the Middle Ages. This style derives from the nationalist narrative imposed by the Serbian Orthodox church since the 1980s and is widely used across former Yugoslav countries.[44] Inside the church there is a list of donators for the reconstruction. From the twenty-two donators, only three are from Donji Lapac and the surrounding villages, whereas a large part comes from Bosnia, Serbia, United States, Canada and England. Furthermore, in front of the church there is a 2014 erected memorial plaque dedicated to the civilian victims of Operation Storm in August 1995. The inscriptions use Cyrillic script and they do not mention any names.

| | |
|---|---|
| U spomen civilnim žrtvam ubijenim augusta 1995. godine na području Donjeg Lapca. | In memory of the civilian victims killed in August 1995, in Donji Lapac area. |
| Vječnaja pamjat! | Eternal memory! |
| Spomen ploču podižu mještani Donjeg Lapca I udruženje srpskih porodicaa protiv zaborava. | The residents of Donji Lapac and the Association of Serbian Families Against Oblivion erected the memorial plaque. |
| Oktobar 2014[45] | October 2014 |

Such plaques are quite rare and they mostly occur on properties owned by the Serbian Orthodox church or at Serbian Orthodox cemeteries where authorities legally cannot question or remove them.[46] It is also one of the few memorial plaques erected by the Association of Serbian Families Against Oblivion. Although having their head office in Zagreb, they often rely on information and numbers coming from organisations in Banja Luka and Belgrade. For this reason, the organisation shapes memory practices from a Serbian point of view with a victim based narrative. Surprisingly, the inscriptions do not reveal the actual number of victims (in contrast to Croatian memorial plaques). As shown above, they only generalise the victims. Similar to Vukovar's water tower, the diaspora has also funded the church.

West of Donji Lapac is Udbina. It is not only known for its battle in the historical Krbava-field, where the Ottomans defeated the Croatian ban [nobles] in 1493. It also had a tempestuous history during the twentieth century. Correspondingly to Donji Lapac, the Catholic church was also destroyed during World War II. And again, Yugoslav authorities gave a different purpose to the site. In Udbina, however, they constructed a

hotel. After Operation Storm in 1995, the hotel was abandoned and eventually demolished. In 2010, with the help of the Roman Catholic church, the Church of the Croatian Martyrs has been erected on the historical site of the pre-World War II church. However, they kept the original walls and foundation of the former church and left them visible as a reminder. Similarly to Donji Lapac, they rebuilt the church in a neo-medieval architectural style (again differing from its predecessor). With its looks and symbolic power, it strongly refers to the alleged Croat existence in the 9th century and other historical key events. Above the front entrance there are the dates 879 – 2010. The duke of Croatia, Branimir (879-892), received papal recognition from Pope John VIII in 879. The dates are accompanied by the Latin and Croat inscription 'Martyribus Croatorum – Hrvatskim Mučenicima' referring to the Croatian martyrs. It implies a more than thousand year old way of martyrdom. Furthermore, the church includes traditional Croat symbols like the Croatian interlace above the entrance and on the cross. Inside the church there is the Glagolitic script, a predecessor to the Cyrillic script which implies being older than Orthodox tradition.

Another key evidence is in front of the church. There is a cross with the famous Frankopan phrase 'Navik on živi ki zgine pošteno' (Forever lives he, who dies an honourable death) dedicated to the 'Croatian martyrs'. The phrase appears in Fran Krsto Frankopan's (1643-1671) poem *Pozvanje na vojsku* (Call to Arms). The aphorism is a sacrificial narrative, relating to the seventeenth-century 'Zrinski-Frankopan Conspiracy.' The example is a typical nationalist meta-narrative, referring to a continuous foreign rule since the medieval period and specifically to the parts of the country under Hungarian rule. However, it does not always relate to Hungarian rule, but also to Yugoslavian one.

The cross with its aphorism is a reference to the aforementioned sacrificial narrative. This narrative is significantly strengthened with the lapidarium or 'memorial wall'. It is dedicated to the so-called martyrs of

Croatian history and is right behind the cross. There are 249 stones with supposed Croatian execution sites. They always relate to places where alleged crimes on Croats took place. These include places in today's Austria, Slovenia, Herzegovina and Croatia. Two stones refer to the Habsburg-Ottoman wars in Klis in 1537 and in Senj in 1617. A few also relate to the Croatian War of Independence. Yet a majority is dedicated to World War II and Communist crimes between 1941-1948.

During the Covid pandemic, the narrative of suffering has been reinforced by holding the contested yearly Bleiburg commemoration in Udbina. And as Austrian authorities plan to prohibit the commemorations in Bleiburg, Udbina is now on top of the list to become the new commemoration site.[47] The recent gathering even brought a new controversial stone to Udbina's 'memorial wall'. It commemorates the victims of Jasenovac between 1941 and 1948, mixing the victims of the concentration camp (1941-1945) with interned anti-communists in the Stara Gradiška camp (1945-1948) near Jasenovac.

The cases in Donji Lapac and Udbina are based on the destruction of the churches in 1942. And yet, the churches' reconstruction serves another purpose — the employment of a specific narrative. While both employ a narrative of victimhood, the church in Udbina does justice to its name, alluding to a thousand-year-old path (or martyrdom) to independence. However, deducing from the memorial stones in front of the church, they put the primary emphasis on the sufferings during World War II. This narrative will be further strengthened if the Bleiburg-commemoration is actually moving to Udbina. In Donji Lapac, the memorial plaque in front of the church commemorates the 1990s war victims of Donji Lapac. However, its use of the Cyrillic script aims to exclude non-readers of Cyrillic and is a form of claiming history. It employs a more subtle way to impose its narrative than the example in Udbina.

## Knin and surroundings

Knin, in contrast to Vukovar, is known for Croatia's heroic narrative when in August 1995 the Croatian army executed Operation *Oluja* (Storm), which led to the reintegration of Dalmatia, Lika, Kordun and the Banija regions to Croatia. Knin's fortress where president Franjo Tudjman on 6 August 1995 hoisted the Croatian flag became a symbol of Croatia's independence. Since 2000, the yearly commemorations are held at the fortress, having a different meaning and sparking many controversies among several groups.[48]

Knin has a special meaning for Croatian history, as it had been the king's residence in the eleventh century. Until 1991, the fortress functioned as an archaeological museum. By the time, it slowly shifted to a space honouring and celebrating Operation Storm. On the twentieth anniversary of Operation Storm, the new 'Oluja-museum' opened and presented several war-related objects to the public, establishing a metanarrative about the liberation of Serbian Krajina. On top of the fortress, the museum erected a three-metre-high Tudjman statue, referring to his visit on 6 August 1995. Afterwards, Knin and the fortress developed and multiplied its 'winner-narrative'. The fortress is a place of commemoration as politicians and veterans' organisations celebrate there yearly. However, only in 2020 politicians from the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) in Croatia attended the anniversary celebrations for the first time. Until then, there had not been an understanding between Croat and (Croatian) Serb parties to attend it together. One reason is that the commemorations did not mention any Serb victims at all. In 2021, however, Croatia's Serb representatives did not attend the commemoration in Knin.[49]

Although at first glance this might be a step forward to a mutual understanding and cooperation, the authorities are taking further steps to nationalise Knin's public sphere. In 2015, at the time of the opening of

the 'Oluja-museum', city officials and clerics consecrated Croatia's largest church (Crkva Gospe Velikog Hrvatskog Krsnog Zavjeta). It seats up to 1.100 people and is only the second Catholic church in Knin after the St. Anthony church. It does not carry the same narrative(s) as the church in Udbina, but its grandiose architectural style catches a lot of attention and builds a powerful influence in the public sphere.

The third example in Knin is in its town centre, on the train station's forecourt. There are two monuments dedicated to the 1990s war. A small one by the Croatian railroad Disabled Veterans' organisation, which erected it on the first anniversary of Knin's liberation in August 1996. There is the Croatian coat of arms, with the typical Croatian interlace (see fig. 6). The interlace resembles the letter 'U' in the same way it is visible on the first page of the Independent Croatia's 1941 constitution (fig. 5). Also, the Croatian checkerboard begins with a white field (as it used to between 1941-1945).

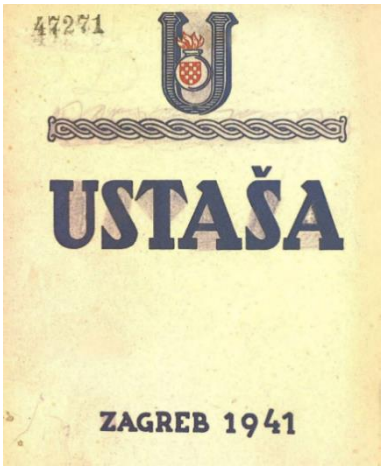


**Figure 5:** Independent Croatia's constitution, 1941. Published by ured za promičbu glavnog ustaškog stanka [office for the promotion of the Ustasha-State], Zagreb.

**Figure 6:** Monument in Knin with the 'U'-frame. Photo by the author, October 2020.

Just next to it, in 2011, authorities unveiled a monument dedicated to Operation Storm. It is incorporated into the train station's forecourt and comprises a small fountain, plates with information on events preceding Operation Storm and the operation itself. The monument has a chapel resembling the letter 'V', which stands for victory, a commonly used symbol during the war and on various monuments throughout Croatia (See chapter about Vukovar). There are two screens incorporated into the monument, showing original war footage and interviews. Both monuments are immediately visible to people entering or leaving the train station, thus transmitting the image of Croatia's Operation Storm winner-narrative. Almost twenty-seven years after Operation Storm, the controversies regarding the fact that neither the commemoration at the fortress nor the monuments mention any civilian victims at all has not been solved yet.

Although Knin lost more than half of its population compared to 1991, the surrounding villages suffered an even greater loss. These (mostly) vacant villages and remote areas show characteristic memory practises similar to the memorial park Trokut in the previous chapter. Baljci, south of Knin, is such a village. According to the 2011 Census, it has three

inhabitants. Before the 1990s war, it was one of the several majority Serbian villages in this area and was closely located to the southern borders of the Serbian Krajina and at the foot of the Svilaja mountain range. Historically, the village had a mixed Christian-Orthodox and Greek-Catholic population.[50] However, until World War II, the Greek-Catholic population declined severely. Its only artefact is the ruin of the Greek-Catholic church. There is also a Serbian-Orthodox church from the eighteenth century at the Orthodox cemetery. After being strongly damaged during the 1990s war, former locals reconstructed the church in 2006. At the cemetery's entrance is a 1977 erected partisan monument. The monument's memorial plaque lies shattered on the ground. However, even here, someone put the pieces together and put them in front of the monument. It shows that the monument is still a part of local memory.

Although it does not involve a partisan monument, there is an example where even the Croatian Minister of Interior intervened in unveiling a monument with Serbian inscriptions in the village of Golubić near Knin in 2011.[51] He justified his decision by arguing it could otherwise spark unrest. Besides that, the monument did not get a permission by the authorities to be erected as the land parcel belongs to the municipality. Like in Donji Lapac, the Association of Serbian Families Against Oblivion funded this monument in Golubić. The authorities ordered to remove the monument immediately, but local officials only changed the plaque and removed all the names, as not all were verified and several names were suspected of being members of the Krajina army. Afterwards, the plaque read 'Sjećanje na Golubićane stradale u ratovima' (In memory of Golubić residents who died in wars), thus generalising the memory. And despite not removing the monument at all, there is also no official gathering around the monument anymore.

Due to its proximity to the former Krajina border, the area had been very disputed, claiming many casualties. For this reason, there are many

memorial plaques for Croatian soldiers, especially for those belonging to HOS-units. Between November 1992 and August 1994, several small military operations took place at the Svilaja mountain range. On a difficult to access road between Baljci and Mirlović Polje, there is a memorial plaque dedicated to 'Rafael Vitez Boban', a member of the 9th HOS-division. The inscriptions begin with the letter 'U' standing for Ustasha. The following inscriptions even confirm it: 'Bio si i ostao ustaški sin' (You were and still are an Ustasha son) and the salute *za dom spremni*, which also appears in the memorial park Trokut in Western Slavonia.


**Figure 7:** Mirlović Polje, photo by the author, October 2020.

In contrast to the HOS-unit in Western Slavonia, they named this one after the high ranking Ustasha general Rafael 'Vitez' Boban (1907-unknown). The additive 'Vitez' relates to the highest military decoration

of the Independent State of Croatia, which Rafael Boban received in February 1945. In the light of the monument in Golubić, authorities did not question the memorial plaque in Mirlović Polje, despite the use of Independent Croatia slogans and the possibility of civil unrest.

## Conclusion

After 1995, most of the researched area had been or still is uninhabited. For the government it meant turning the tables, as they took advantage and nationalised the scorched earth. With this in mind, Hobsbawm's quote from the introduction: 'The past gives a more glorious background to a present that doesn't have much to show for itself' applies to the researched area very well. At a later stage, veterans' organisations and the diaspora got involved, which shaped the commemorations and maintained the memory of successfully defending Croatia.

The key conclusion here is the close relation between religion and war, which the reconstruction of sacred architecture has shown. The examples in Donji Lapac and Udbina not only aim to bring back the century-long existence of a certain community into memory, but also combine it with the suffering narrative of war. Another key observation is that even transformed partisan monuments have religious symbols in it. Nevertheless, there are two different streams, each heading in another direction. On one side, memorial practises consist either of state-organised gatherings or civil society actors. Counter-narratives almost do not exist, as they are overshadowed by the official and widely recognised war-narrative. On the other side, there are commemorations at partisan monuments. That phenomenon is very obvious in majority Serb villages. The situation in Donji Lapac and Golubić shows that inscriptions referring to the 1990s war are perceived controversially and are often exposed to vandalism. Under these circumstances, locals in

Serb majority villages use (reconstructed) partisan monuments for memorial services. It is another way of strengthening their identity and (re-)claiming its space.

Although this case study was limited to areas inside or close to the former Serbian Krajina in Croatia, it adds further qualitative data and deepens our knowledge within the field of memory studies. It also proves and confirms existing literature on Croatia's difficulty dealing with its past and its collective memory. This article shed light on several actors in memorialisation processes like private companies, the church, local politics, veterans' organisations, and people from the diaspora. The analysis of the inscriptions and semiotics confirms the influence of the mentioned groups.

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*periods* (Ann Arbor, 2006); P. M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*. (Cambridge - London, 2017).

[22] Judson, *Habsburg*, 275.

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[27] T. Banjeglav, ´The Alphabet War: Language, Collective Memory and National Identity in Contemporary Debates over National Minority Rights in Croatia', in: *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 23/5 (2021), 695-708.

[28] Banjeglav, ´The Alphabet´, 697.

[29] D. Jović, *Rat i mit. Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb, 2017).

[30] K. Sabo, *Ikonen der Nationen: Heldendarstellungen im post-sozialistischen Kroatien und Serbien* (Berlin, 2017), 158.

[31] Zakon o blagdanima, spomendanima i neradnim danima u Republici Hrvatskoj Narodne Novine 110/19 (2020).

[32] I visited the site in October 2021 and it is overgrown and partially damaged.

[33] B. Baillie, ´The Dudik Memorial Complex: Commemoration and Changing Regimes in the Contested City of Vukovar´, in: M. L. S. Sørensen et al. (eds.), *Memorials in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict, Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict* (Cham, 2021), 210; ´Sećanje na nevine žrtve na vukovarskom Dudiku´ <https://srbi.hr/secanje-na-nevine-zrtve-na-vukovarskom-dudiku/> [Accessed 12/05/2022].

[34] Traditional Serbian national hat or cap.

[35] I visited the site in 2018 and 2021 and on both occasions there were wreaths. Furthermore, the commemorations were covered by several local news. See:

´Parastos ratnim žrtvama na vukovarskom vojničkom groblju´ <https://arhiva.portalnovosti.com/2010/09/pokrajine-28/> [Accessed 12/5/2022]; ´Zašto nema reakcije na odavanje počasti na 'groblju šajkača'? 'Agresorske žrtve' postaju važnije, a hrvatske se diskriminiraju´ <https://narod.hr/hrvatska/foto-josic-zasto-nema-reakcije-na-odavanje-pocasti-na-groblju-sajkaca-agresorske-zrtve-postaju-vaznije-a-hrvatske-se-diskriminiraju> [Accessed 12/5/2022].

[36] ´Suživot koji to nije – položili vijence na groblju šajkača´<https://kamenjar.com/suzivot-koji-to-nije-polozili-vijence-na-groblju-sajkaca/> [Accessed 12/5/2022].

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[38] Ministarstvo kulture Republike Hrvatske – Konzervatorski odjel u Osijeku rješenjem br. 01-300/3-72. od 30.10.1972. g. na svojoj sjednici održanoj 16.12.1972.

[39] Ministarstvo kulture Republike Hrvatske – Konzervatorski odjel u Osijeku rješenje br. 345, 11.1.1973.

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[41] Odluka Ustavnog suda Republike Hrvatske Broj: U-III-1296/2016 Zagreb, 25. svibnja 2016.

[42] According to the website of the Serb Democratic Party <https://sdss.hr/uredenje-spomen-kompleksa-trokut-kod-novske/> [Accessed 13/8/2021].

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[44] D. Kanin, ´Faith, Nation, and Structure: The Diachronic Durability of Orthodox Churches in the Balkans´, in: S. Ramet, *Orthodox Churches and Politics in Southeastern Europe* (Cham, 2020), 15-40.

[45] The memorial plaque is written in Cyrillic script.

[46] Such plaques can be found in Eastern Croatia (Borovo Selo, Marinci), Western Slavonia (Medari), Banija (Donji Žirovac). They are often exposed to vandalism.

[47] ´Bleiburg-Treffen: Innenministeriumsexperten für Verbot´ <https://orf.at/stories/3237680/> [Accessed 12/12/2021].

[48] T. Banjeglav, ´Sjećanje na rat ili rat Sjećanja? Promjene u politikama sjećanja u Hrvatskoj od 1990. godine do danas´, in: D. Karačić, T. Banjeglav, and N. Govedarica, *Revizija prošlosti: politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Serbiji od 1990 godine* (Sarajevo, 2012), 144.

[49] Deutsche Welle, ´Proslava Oluje: da li je zapela politika pomirenja?´ < https://www.dw.com/sr/proslava-oluje-da-li-je-zapela-politika-pomirenja/a-58763835> [Accessed 15/5/2022].

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# The Historical Department at the Danish Library in South Schleswig in Germany

**MOGENS ROSTGAARD NISSEN, KLAUS TOLSTRUP PETERSEN & MARTIN BO NØRREGÅRD**

DANSK CENTRALBIBLIOTEK FOR SYDSLESVIG

Dansk Centralbibliotek for Sydslesvig – the Danish Library in South Schleswig – houses a history department, which includes two unique collections; The Schleswig Collection and the Danish minority archive. These collections constitute the basis of the historical research made at the library.

## The history department

The department was established in 1963 to promote historical and scientific research, especially concerning the history of the Danish minority in South Schleswig and the history of the old Duchy of Schleswig.

The research is disseminated through lectures, articles, digital presentations, summer schools and not least via books. Since the first book was published in 1966, the department has published more than

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Mogens Rostgaard Nissen, Klaus Tolstrup Petersen & Martin Bo Nørregård, 'Archival Review: The historical department at the Danish Library in South Schleswig Germany', in: *Studies on National Movements* 9 (2022)

80 titles. A large part of these publications are available as PDF files, and can be freely downloaded from our website.

The historical department also helps and gives advice to university students and scholars about the use of our materials and the history in the region and offer students the possibility of a traineeship. We work closely together with both German and Danish universities in the region, and in cooperation with them we arrange an annual summer school. Usually we have a PhD research fellow attached to the department that is enrolled at a Danish university.

## The Schleswig Collection

The Schleswig Collection is a unique book collection covering the old Duchy of Schleswig. Today, the Danish-German border divides this Duchy, and the northern part – South Jutland/North Schleswig – belongs to Denmark whilst the southern part – South Schleswig – is a part of Germany. Schleswig is still characterized by a common history and culture transcending the borders, and formerly the population felt a regional identity that was neither Danish nor German.

One main objective of The Schleswig Collection is to preserve this cultural heritage and make it accessible to the public. The collection is open to all and has a wide range of users, e.g. students, scholars and historians working on assignments, articles and books. We also offer different kinds of events, lectures and exhibitions with a focus on Schleswig.

The Schleswig Collection can be traced back to 1891, when Danish-minded people in Schleswig wanted to establish a 'scientific collection of source material on the history of Southern Jutland intended for all who would examine the history of our people and the development of our

country and language through the ages'. The Danish-minded member of the German Reichstag in Berlin, Gustav Johannsen, agreed to establish the book collection in his private home, and this was the start of the Danish Library in South Schleswig. Today many of Johannsen's books are still available in the collection.

The first time The Schleswig Collection was registered as an independent collection was in 1949. At that time, it numbered 2.587 works. For many years the collection was in a stack-room separated from the rest of the library, but in 2010 it was opened up and made accessible to all users. In recent years we have worked on developing the collection into a research library. Since 2018 the ECMI Library (European Center for Minority Issues) has been located together with The Schleswig Collection. The ECMI Library is a book collection with literature on minorities throughout Europe, consisting of approx. 3,500 works. Together these two collections offer a unique opportunity to explore and examine minority issues in a local as well as in a more global context.

The Schleswig Collection contains books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, etc. about Schleswig, predominantly in the five languages and dialects spoken in the region; Danish, German, Frisian, Southern Jutlandic (Sønderjysk) and Low German. Thematically it includes history, biographies, art, language and dialect research, social conditions, nature and the environment, and much more. Fiction, music and children's books from the Schleswig area are also richly represented in the collection. The aim is to collect and preserve all literature that deals with Schleswig, and as something special it includes material from both the Danish and the German side of the border. Today, The Schleswig Collection consists of approx. 55.000 materials, the vast majority of which can be lent through the library's own website. The materials can also be lent to Danish libraries via bibliotek.dk or as interlibrary lending in Germany.

The crown jewel is the antiquarian book collection, which consists of approx. 600 books from the late 16th century to the 1880s. The oldest book is a law book from Eiderstedt, which can be dated to 1591.

**Figure 1:** In September 2019, Queen Margrethe II visited The Schleswig Collection. Here she was introduced to the collection and some of its oldest books. Reference: Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig.

These books are stored securely in climate and theft-proof cabinets and can only be used at the library. In 2014, the old books were digitized with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and are now freely available on our website.

We have around 20 reading places, which can be used freely during the library's opening hours, just as it is possible to reserve a study or a group room.

Genealogists are a special target group that often use the collection to place their Schleswig family relations in a broader historical context. Every other year, we also arrange a large Danish-German genealogy day.

**Figure 2:** In 2018 The Schleswig Collection held a Danish-German genealogy day for the third time. This is a picture from one of the many stands that participated in the event. Photo: Marco Petersen.

## The Danish minority archive

The Danish minority archive was established in 1989 to collect, register and preserve archival material related to the Danish minority in South Schleswig. This applies to both archives from the many associations and institutions of the minority group, as well as to private individuals and companies associated with it. Since most of the minority organizations were established after the referendum in 1920, much of the archive materials dates from the time thereafter. However, the collection's many personal archives also contain significant and very varied material from the time before 1920. The archive is a private institution and therefore does not contain systematic state or municipal archives. In addition to containing material from the Danish minority, there are also several

personal archives submitted by people associated with the Frisian minority in the western part of Schleswig.

The predominant part of the collection consists of written records that are registered by type. This is personal-, association-, institutional-, business- and church archives, to which is added a topographical collection.

The personal archives are very different, but all the persons have had some connection to South Schleswig. In the vast majority of cases, they have also been part of the minority. In terms of content, the archives vary widely, from individual papers or letters to documentation of every aspect of a person's life and work. Often these are the leaders of the minority: politicians, editors, journalists, teachers, etc., while the ordinary members of the minority – e.g. workers, farmers or smallholders – are relatively poorly represented.

A very large part of the minority's work takes place in the associations, with the South Schleswig Association (Sydslesvigsk Forening, SSF), the South Schleswig Danish Youth Associations (Sydslesvigs danske Ungdomsforeninger, SdU) and the South Schleswig Electoral Association (Sydslesvigsk Vælgerforening, SSW) as some of the most important. Both the main departments and many of the local offices have handed in records to the archive, but for the latter there are many gaps both geographically and temporally. The archive also contains material from several associations north of the border, whose purpose is to maintain support for the Danish minority.

The institutional archives largely consist of materials from the minority schools and, as in the case of the local association archives, there are also many gaps here. The situation is different with the archive from SSF's central secretariat, which is very comprehensive and contains material from its founding in the 1920s until now, and which is the most extensive

collection in the archive. Other archives include the Danish Library and the History Department.

The church archives contain the church registration books from the Danish congregations in South Schleswig, as well as protocols and other papers from the parish councils.

There are relatively few business archives. Among them, however, are banks, actual production companies, trading companies and a few newspapers, including the main minority paper, *Flensborg Avis*.

The topographic archives and the 'diverse' archives are in many ways similar. The topographies are arranged geographically, and contain archives that happen to come from or illuminate a particular area. The 'diverse' archives are thematically arranged, and ranges widely from genealogical records over various personal papers and occasional songs to collections of cookbooks and banknotes. It also contains a chronological collection, which consists predominantly of various pamphlets.

In addition to written archival sources, the archive also contains a large number of pictures and maps in the form of photos, engravings and posters. We do not have a precise number of the amount of photos we have, but in terms of age, they stretch from the 1860s to the present. The collection consists of a mix of amateur and professional photos, with varied motifs ranging from portrait photos over landscapes and city photos to various events.

**Figure 3:** The archive contains a large amount of pictures from Flensburg including this picture from Große Str., which was taken in 1868. To the left is the old town hall. Reference: The archive at the Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig.

The picture collection includes several large collections, for example the Flensburg photographer Remmer's large glass plate collection, which is completely digitized, and *Flensborg Avis*' photo archive from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.

The archive's collection of engravings consists partly of old maps, city plans and city prospectuses, some of which date from the end of the 16th century. Another part consists of illustrations, which mostly are from the Schleswig wars in 1848-1850 and 1864.

In addition to this there is a map collection, which mainly consists of maps from the last 150 years. We also have a poster collection that

includes a large number of plebiscite posters and leaflets from 1920 and many SSW election posters, just as we have many posters from the annual Danish minority meetings.


**Figure 4:** In 1932 the Nazis waged an active election campaign in Flensburg, where Hitler also visited the city. In our archives you can for instance find this image with Nazi election propaganda. Reference: The archive at the Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig.

Finally, the archive contains a large collection of historical films, most of which have been digitized. A large part of our films is visible at the homepage 'Danmark på film' at [filmcentralen.dk/museum/danmark-paa-film](filmcentralen.dk/museum/danmark-paa-film)

The archive's various collections are searchable at the portal arkiv.dk. Far from all photographs are digitally registered, but those that are can be seen on arkiv.dk, which also applies to maps, cards, engravings and posters.

All archives are private archives, and the terms of access to them have been agreed with the individual donors. This means that some archives

are freely available, while others are subject to different clauses. This applies, for example, to several of the large archives from associations and institutions, where in many cases they have chosen to follow the Schleswig-Holstein archive legislation. In addition to these agreements, of course, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies.

**Keywords:** Schleswig Collection, Danish minority archive, Danish-German border, cultural heritage, minority issues and languages, Danish-German genealogy, Schleswig literature, topographic archives.

# Digitalising and internationalising research on nationalism in Flanders: Towards a third Encyclopedia of the Flemish movement

**ANN MARES, ARAGORN FUHRMANN, KAS SWERTS & SARAH MENU**

ADVN
ARCHIEF VOOR NATIONALE BEWEGINGEN

In the 1970s, the first edition of a reference work appeared that would serve as a general starting point for research, inquiries and other forms of acquiring knowledge about the Flemish Movement: the *Encyclopaedia of the Flemish Movement* (1973-1975) left its mark on countless books, articles, theses, websites, lectures, reports, exhibitions, documentaries, and debates. When a second edition was published twenty-five years later, the influence of this standard work only increased. The *New Encyclopaedia of the Flemish Movement* (NEVB) is still an indispensable instrument in the year 2022. However, this does not alter the fact that nationalism in Flanders, both within and outside party politics, as well as the general social context, has changed profoundly. Now that another twenty-five years will have passed since the last edition, this rich scholarly tradition demands a new addition.

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Ann Mares, Aragorn Fuhrmann, Kas Swerts & Sarah Menu, 'Archival Review: Digitalising and internationalising research on nationalism in Flanders: Towards a third Encyclopedia of the Flemish movement', in: *Studies on National Movements* 9 (2022)


**Figure 1:** The *New Encyclopaedia of the Flemish Movement*, published in 1998

## The DEVB-project

At the end of 2018, ADVN | archive for national movements (Antwerp, Belgium) launched a broadly-supported scientific project, with a grant from the Flemish government, which will ensure the further development of the encyclopaedia and will guide this standard work into the digital age. The digital *Encyclopaedia of the Flemish Movement* (DEVB) aims to make the collected information widely accessible to a broad audience: from researchers with a scientific agenda, policy makers, journalists, to all other possibly-interested parties. Even more than its predecessors, the DEVB has the ambition to become the starting point for all research and knowledge on the Flemish Movement and Flemish nationalism, both in Belgium and abroad. It wants to form a bridge between historical knowledge and heritage, between academic research and public outreach, and between science and education. Because of its online nature, the massive amount of information the DEVB holds is only a mouse-click away from a broad audience and will also be regularly updated after its initial launch in 2023.

As a reflection of the state of research and novel insights in nationalism studies, this edition also tends to place various new accents on its content. One of the focal points is the international dimension of both the history of the Flemish Movement and research on it. After a general presentation of the DEVB-project by means of the two phases in the development of the encyclopaedia, we will briefly discuss this important but complex challenge.

**Figure 2:** Frontage of the ADVN | Archive for National Movements, © Lucid Vermelden

## Phase 1: the start-up (2019-2020)

Based on the principle that scientific knowledge should be used for the benefit of society as much as possible, an 'open access' model was chosen, with free use of the encyclopaedia. The first phase of the project therefore focused on the development of an underlying digital infrastructure that meets the requirements of the different target audiences. Furthermore, all the texts of the *New Encyclopaedia* were made available digitally via www.nevb.be as 'NEVB Online'. Both the public and research community were involved in the project from the outset by means of crowdsourcing: visitors to the website were invited to point out errors or gaps in the NEVB.

Another focus in this first phase was the development of a widespread network and solid cooperation structures. These would guarantee a fruitful interaction between authors, editors and advisors, which is essential for this project. Thus, a core editorial board was established from the authoritative academics in the field (in particular: Marnix Beyen (UAntwerp), Elke Brems (KULeuven), Bruno De Wever (UGhent), Chantal Kesteloot (Cegesoma/Rijksarchief), Dave Sinardet (VUB), Johan Tollebeek (KULeuven), Jeffrey Tyssens (VUB), Maarten Van Ginderachter (UAntwerp), Kaat Wils (KULeuven)) who oversee the scientific quality of the project, and an advisory board of dozens of specialists from various disciplines and bodies was put together. This working method makes it possible to furnish the DEVB with all the studies that have been carried out over the past twenty-five years, as well as stimulate new research on the Flemish Movement within the university departments. Such a broad mobilisation of experts not only illustrates the current status quaestionis, but also identifies gaps in our knowledge.

After a thorough preparation and documentation round, which resulted in formulating necessary working documents such as authors'

guidelines, lists of terms and a vision text, authors were appointed to update a first selection of the general introductory articles of the *New Encyclopaedia* (Literature, Economy, Catholic Party, Second World War, etc.) and to supplement them with a number of completely new texts. Each revised article was read and commented on by three specialists in accordance with the principle of blind peer review.


**Figure 3:** Logo of the third and digital *Encyclopaedia of the Flemish movement*, designed by Adriaan Tas.

## Phase 2: the development (2020-2023)

After the digital foundations of the encyclopaedia have been laid, this basis will now be further developed in a second phase covering three years (2021-2023) and culminating in the official launch in the course of 2023. This second phase will start by updating the remaining introductory articles. Furthermore, all the lemmas of the NEVB will be

reworked and supplemented with a first set of necessary new lemmas. In addition to these content-related objectives, a new step is also being taken in the development of the digital tool: after the development of a data infrastructure for the management and research of the lemmas and the structured data that are linked to them, the construction of a user-friendly online portal is in progress.

The development of an online portal is not only intended to make the DEVB easily searchable and to make the lemmas accessible to a wide audience in an attractive way. The portal will also function as a conduit to other information sources and thus help to unlock the rich collection of digitised heritage. To this end, the effort which started in the previous phase to provide lemmas with links to external databases will be continued and expanded on to include the ADVN's heritage collections and links to the collections of other archival institutions.

**Figure 4:** Picture of M. Hroch. With, among others, a new lemma on the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch, the encyclopaedia wants to pay more attention to the international dimension of (research on) the Flemish Movement. ADVN.

## Challenges: internationalisation of the research on the Flemish movement

As a renewed and innovative historical standard work, the digital encyclopaedia wants to open itself up to recent social evolutions and new scientific insights, although it must also admit its own limitations. Since the DEVB, like most reference works, is bound to the state of research, it is not its task to fill in the gaps. It does, however, want to identify them thoroughly and draw attention to them in order to facilitate new research.

One of the most important challenges for nationalism research in Flanders is the international-comparative perspective and the problem of methodological nationalism: the tendency to interpret historical actors and evolutions in a one-dimensional way in the light of nations and national movements. From the point of view of methodological nationalism, many of the most critical studies on nation-building and nationalism reproduce and perpetuate the ideology of the nation by not fundamentally questioning its self-evidence as a perspective on the world.

As a counter-reaction, international nationalism studies have recently developed a strong interest in transnational cross-links and overlaps. Thus, researchers compare different national movements and draw attention to mutual parallels and differences that relativise and put into perspective their supposed uniqueness. Others elaborate on how a national movement is not an isolated phenomenon but shows great sensitivity to international developments and even continuously interacts with other (national) cultures.

By contrast, the flourishing interest in international comparisons and transfers in other regions' historiography shows how little resonance this approach currently finds in the study of the Flemish Movement. With

new articles such as 'The Flemish Movement from an International and Comparative Perspective', 'Cultural Transfers', 'Spain' (on both the Basque and Catalan question) and 'Ireland', the DEVB wants to draw attention to this lacuna and offer an impetus to an international comparative study of the Flemish Movement.

Finally, this objective of internationalising the study of the Flemish movement is further emphasised by the ambition to make at least part of the encyclopaedia (the introductory articles) available in English and French. The DEVB can thus present the study of nationalism in Flanders and the Flemish Movement internationally, and offer a platform and point of reference for an external target audience that wants to immerse itself in Flemish and Belgian issues.

**Figure 5:** The Flemish politician Nelly Maes exchanges gifts with Ernest Benach i Pascual, former president of the Catalan Parliament (2003–2010), in the Catalan Parliament. The international dimension of the encyclopaedia is reflected in new introductory articles, among others on the Catalan and Basque nationalist movements. ADVN.

**Keywords:** Flemish movement, Flemish nationalism, Flemish historiography, Flemish archives, Encyclopaedia of the Flemish movement, comparative study of national movements.

# State of Nationalism (SoN): Ethics of Nationalism

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Is nationalism morally defensible, or is it a destructive holdover from our primitive past? Are certain forms of nationalism normatively preferable to others? To what extent are liberals ethically entitled to accommodate the demands and concerns of nationalists? Do the claims of nationality entail a right to independence or autonomy? Can the 'politics of cultural survival' justify the state's protection and promotion of particular national identities? This article will provide an overview of how thinkers have dealt with such problems in the different eras of the study of nationalism.

## Nationalism in the history of political thought

Compared to other modern political ideologies, such as liberalism or socialism, nationalism has a dearth of canonical works. As Yack observes, theoretical works on nationalism have historically consisted of major texts by second rate thinkers, or minor texts by first rate thinkers.[1] Nonetheless, the most significant texts on nationalism produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continue to shape the contours of many contemporary strands of nationalist thought.

Nationalism makes its first significant appearance in the history of political thought within the republican tradition. While Machiavelli

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(1469-1527) gestures towards nationalism in his call for Italian unity in the closing chapter of *The Prince*, it is Rousseau (1712-1788) who makes a sustained engagement with the potential of nationalism for republican politics.[2] Rousseau insists that while the Enlightenment's cosmopolitan ideal of universal benevolence is indeed an admirable disposition, it is achievable perhaps by 'a few great cosmopolitan souls'.[3] Sympathy or compassion, Rousseau argues, diminishes the further it is extended away from the individual; a steadier political order can be built by channeling the feelings of self-interest and pre-political feelings of kinship than upon abstract obligations to humanity. Rousseau thus turns towards nationalism, which, insofar as it promotes patriotism, emerges as a useful tool for binding citizens to republics. Nationalism ties the citizen's self-interest and vanity (*amour-propre*) to the health and prestige of the community – the citizen takes pride both in his nation's standing in the international sphere and his own standing as a patriot within the community. Rousseau adds that nationalism's fostering of a strong collective identity contributes towards the struggles of smaller nations such as Poland against foreign conquest and imperial domination. It is important to note that for both Rousseau and Machiavelli, the political community does not exist to further the cause of nationalism, but rather the reverse.

The normative weight attributed to nationalism begins to shift as we turn to another eighteenth-century critique of the Enlightenment, Herder (1744-1803). Herder makes a pluralistic argument in favour of nationalism that would influence twentieth-century thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor. Herder argues that a people's language opens up the world to them in a particular way – as such, different nations have their own particular ways of being that develop throughout the course of their respective histories. Each nation, therefore, has its own genius and its own form of happiness that it should be free to express and pursue. While Herder is critical of the cosmopolitan impulse

towards the dissolution of national differences, he nonetheless understands the plurality of nations as participating within a universal humanity, the design of which is known only to God. With Herder, nationalism is therefore no longer simply a *means* towards promoting patriotism and republican virtue, but a shard of an infinitely diverse divine mosaic, which celebrates the particular without losing sight of the universal.[4]

Herder's romantic (or proto-romantic) nationalism would be taken up and radicalised by Fichte (1762-1814). Fichte's influential writings on nationalism, the *Addresses to the German Nation*, were originally delivered with the intention of galvanising resistance to the Napoleonic occupation of the German states.[5] He attempted to forge a common German identity among its disparate cities and principalities that could form a united front against Napoleonic France's imperial ambitions. While Fichte intended German national consciousness to be in the service of national liberty, the work remains controversial for its indulgence in German chauvinism. While Fichte understands language to be the defining marker of the German nation, he insists that German is the only living language in Europe (as opposed to the dead and derivative Latin languages), and attributes a unique metaphysical destiny to the German nation as the saviour of European civilisation and heralds of a new age. The subsequent development of militant right-wing nationalism in Prussia and Germany would, whether fairly or not, cast a long shadow over the reception of Fichte's political thought, and nationalist thought more generally. Renan (1823-1892) would reject the German tradition of identifying the nation with pre-political attributes such as language (or ethnicity) and instead inspire future civic nationalists by famously characterising the nation as a daily plebiscite.[6]

## Mid-twentieth-century thought: The end of nationalism?

By the post-war period nationalism was widely understood as having fulfilled its transitory role in the development of the modern nation state and dissolution of empires, but had outlived its purpose with devastating effects and therefore could no longer be ethically justified.

The tendency is best exemplified by Kohn, whose influential work anticipates the civil/ethnic nationalism binary, and foresees the end of nationalism. Kohn distinguishes between Western (French, British, American) and Eastern (German, Italian, Slavic) nationalism. He writes that the former was grounded on 'a rational and universal concept of political liberty and the rights of man, looking toward the city of the future', while the latter is based on an irrational, mystical '*Volksgeist* and its manifestations in literature and folklore, in the mother tongue, and in history', rooted in the past and committed to the 'diversity and self-sufficiency of nations'.[7] Kohn argues that nationalism is dangerous because it sets up a fraction of humanity as a whole, challenging the universalism at the heart of Western civilisation. While nationalism may have initially dignified the masses and secured individual liberty and happiness, 'now it undermines them and subjects them to the exigencies of its continued existence, which seems no longer justified. Once it was a great force of life, spurring on the evolution of mankind; now it may become a dead weight upon the march of humanity'.[8]. In particular, fascism pushed the idea of nationalism to its limits, revealing an ethical imperative for humanity to depoliticise nationality and organise itself on a supranational basis.[9]

Berlin, however, was more sceptical of the supposedly inevitable eclipse of nationalism. He criticised the naivete of intellectuals who had predicted that moral and technological progress would inevitably erase national borders, while morality would increasingly come to be founded upon universal rational principles. Influenced by Herder, Berlin was

committed to a philosophical pluralism; he thought there was no one correct way of understanding the world or of finding happiness within it. He also agreed that our need to belong to a community or collective unit is a 'basic human need or desire', which he thought was best served by nationalism in modern mass democracies. Hence, Berlin could follow Herder in envisioning a nationalism that embodied and respected cultural pluralism as something to be valued. Nonetheless, Berlin was also keenly aware of the dangers of nationalism. Populist politicians, for example, often exploit or foster national grievances to serve their own ends. In such cases, the 'bent twig' of a pluralistic nationalism all too easily snaps. These dangers do not mean, however, that nationalism can be abandoned. Berlin maintains that any political movement will be unlikely to succeed in the twentieth century if it does not ally itself to nationalist sentiment, and that we must pay much greater attention to nationalism, so as to avoid the fate of those who 'failed to foresee' the development of nationalism and 'paid for it with their liberty, indeed with their lives'.[10]

## Liberal nationalism, civic nationalism, and their critics

The late twentieth century saw a new wave of political theorists take up the topic of nationalism. This uptick was related to two major trends, both of which put doubt to the idea that nationalism was simply a passing phase on the road to cosmopolitanism:

> [i] the development of communitarian political philosophy in the 1980s and 90s, which understands individuals as members of a *particular* political community, whose ability to live a meaningful ethical life is dependent on their being situated within the context of a particular language and culture;[11]

> [ii] the rise of nationalist movements in communist and post-communist countries, as well as national separatist movements in Quebec and Western Europe.

Spurred by these two developments liberal nationalists sought to limit the dangers of the re-emergent nationalism through appeals to liberal norms and values, while also using communitarian and nationalist insights to enrich liberal thought.[12] Rejecting the liberal and cosmopolitan claims that nationalism is an inherently irrational force, they argue that nationality should be granted normative weight in the way we think about a wide range of political issues, including (but not limited to) the legitimate boundaries of political communities, the right to national self-determination, cultural preservation and promotion, citizenship, the rights of cultural minorities, and the scope of duties to those outside one's own borders. They attempted to bridge the apparent divide between liberalism and nationalism by acknowledging the importance of 'belonging, membership, and cultural affiliations, as well as the particular moral commitments that follow from them' on the one hand, and 'the value of personal autonomy and individual rights and freedoms' as well as 'a commitment for social justice both between and within nations' on the other.[13] Tamir, for example, defines a liberal national entity as one that endorses liberal principles of distribution (of goods and public offices) and individual rights both within the community and between other nations, with a public space reflective of the national culture and its overlapping consensus of values (while still granting individuals a choice between cultures available within the state).

In opposition, civic nationalists attempted to conceptualise a form of nationalism dependent upon *political* (rather than cultural) commitment towards the nation's (liberal) institutions and principles.[14] Habermas argues against communitarian theories of citizenship that claim that meaningful, active citizenship requires a strong national

identity informed by ethnic or cultural ties, confined within national borders. While the nation originally referred to a pre-political entity defined by ethnicity and culture, it has since been transformed to refer to a political nation of citizens 'who actively exercise their civil rights' in common.[15] Habermas therefore argues that political culture must be the basis of what he calls 'constitutional patriotism', which replaces cultural/ethnic identity as the source civic identification.

Liberal nationalists in Canada expressed scepticism towards civic nationalist claims.[16] Anticipating Canovan and Yack's critique that the civic nation is an ethnocentric myth obscuring the ethnic bases that continue to inform 'Western' or 'civic' nationalism, these thinkers claimed that even supposedly liberal political institutions inevitably betray certain ethnic/cultural origins, whether through the adoption of official languages or historically and culturally conditioned conceptions of justice or the good.[17] For liberal nationalists, this meant recognising, accepting, and accommodating the fact that elements of cultural or ethnic nationalism cannot be overcome through appeals to a purely civic nationalism or constitutional patriotism. They therefore advocated making peace with the nationalist bases of liberal states through various means, such as increased accommodation and state support of the national culture and political rights of 'minority nations', such as Quebec, in the interest of both liberal conceptions of fairness and equality between individuals and groups, and communitarian understandings of the importance of the recognition, and even preservation, of collective identities to a member's freedom and well-being. These strategies will be discussed further in the following section.

Critics of both civic and liberal nationalism, on the other hand, highlighted the difficulty of preventing the bent twig of civic or liberal nationalism from reverting to liberalism or snapping in the direction of ethnic nationalism.[18] In other words, many scholars of nationalism were skeptical of the possibility of creating a normatively or morally

acceptable form of nationalism in the guise of either civic or liberal nationalism. Weinstock, for example, maintains that both civic and liberal nationalism contain tensions that will cause them to collapse into either ethnic nationalism or liberal cultural neutrality.[19] This is because nationalists must either dissociate a community's values from their roots in a shared history and tradition, or narrow or 'ethnicise' the conditions of immigration or membership into the nation in order to preserve a national identity. The civic nationalist solution dissolves the distinctive content that animates nationalism, while the liberal nationalist solution ultimately supports a more closed and problematic form of nationalism. Frost argues that the failed attempt to bifurcate civic and ethnic nationalism, or politics and culture, had caused the liberal nationalist literature to reach an impasse.[20]

## Nationalist approaches to policy

While the possibility of a 'civic' or 'liberal' nationalism plays an important role in the willingness or unwillingness of theorists to turn a sympathetic eye towards the normative claims of nationalism, we must also consider the specific political claims and controversies that animate the normative literature on nationalism. Most importantly, the literature asks how much normative weight should we give to nationalist claims of a right to sub-state autonomy, secession or independence? To what extent can the claims of nationality justify state promotion of particular national identities or the restriction of multicultural policy?

With regard to the first set of questions, nationalists claim that the boundaries of a state should be congruent with that of the nation.[21] Hence, once a population begins to conceive of or imagine themselves as a nation, demands for statehood or greater autonomy often follow. Liberal nationalists are sympathetic to these claims. They claim that

nations, whether fabricated or organic, civil or ethnic, are real entities that serve as the locus of its individual's loyalty, identity and freedom, and thus deserve or require political expression and protection. The question for nationalists is therefore not whether nationality grants a right to political representation, but rather: do the claims of nationhood demand secession and independence, or can they be satisfied by increased autonomy within a multinational state?

Kymlicka, for example, thinks that while national identity does supply normative grounds for independence, he shares Gellner's concern that the disparity between the number of recognised 'nations' and 'states' is ultimately so great, that the recognition of each nation's right to national sovereignty would destabilise the world order.[22] Here the need for peace and stable governance limits the full right to national sovereignty, which are retained as a compromise in the form rights of greater autonomy for national minorities within a multinational state. He therefore advocates increased accommodation and state support of 'minority nations', such as Quebec, through asymmetrical federalism. Not everyone agreed with Kymlicka's compromise. Walzer, for instance, thinks that concerns over destabilisation are either overwrought or insufficient to delegitimise nationalist aspirations for independence or self-governance; that 'justice… doesn't seem to permit the kinds of coercion necessary' to keep unwilling national groups united within a single state'.[23] Walzer even goes so far as to liken liberal support for the multinational state to the defence of the old multinational empires. Taylor, on the other hand, promotes an asymmetrical federalism similar to Kymlicka's, but does so out of a normative commitment to the 'deep diversity' embodied by multinational states.[24] For Taylor, national independence should only be sought for when the aspiration towards the mutual recognition of members of a multinational state becomes impossible. Gans also prefers sub-state autonomy to independence, claiming nationality legitimises sub-state claims to 'self-preservation and collective self-rule', but not

necessarily statist claims to sovereignty over a territory.[25] Miller, meanwhile, is critical of multinational federalism and thinks that the necessity of a singular national identity necessitates the assimilation of national minorities, who for whatever reason are unable or unwilling to seek national independence, into a broader national identity that has been transformed so that national minorities are included.[26]

Given the normative weight liberal nationalists attribute to the nation as a source of identity, a horizon of meaning, the context of choice that make individual freedom, a rich meaningful life, and collective solidarity possible, it is perhaps unsurprising that liberal nationalists think that national majorities and national minorities have stronger claims to the public protection or promotion of national or cultural identities than non-national minorities. Hence, they are willing to put limits on state policies of multiculturalism, or the policy of state neutrality towards the diverse array of ethnic communities within a nation-state. We have already seen that authors such as Taylor, Kymlicka, and Yack think that the possibility of state neutrality towards cultures is a myth; the state always uses (and hence promotes) the language, symbols and conceptions of justice of its majority nation, hence liberal conceptions of fairness requires that the state *also* promote the culture of its national minorities. While this very same promotion of cultural difference *can* and often *does* extend towards multicultural groups, liberal nationalists curtail state promotion or recognition of multicultural or 'non-national' identities when there is a perceived need for the cultural preservation of its national communities.

Miller, in particular, challenges the ethical imperatives of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, finding them to be in tension with the preservation of national identities. He is concerned that their 'quest for cultural diversity may turn out to be self-defeating, because as cultures become more accessible to outsiders they also begin to lose

their depth and their distinctive character'.[27] Miller laments this process of national erosion as he thinks it will mean that:

[a] citizens will lose their access to a 'rich common culture';

[b] non-elites will become increasingly vulnerable to the vagaries of the world market or economy;

[c] the civil solidarity necessary for the maintenance of re-distributive social program will be undermined.[28]

As a result, he argues that the state is justified in discriminating in favour of a shared national culture (whether it be a language, a musical tradition, a landscape, etc.) through the allocation of funds or education in a school curriculum.

Nonetheless, despite a willingness to prioritise, promote, and protect national cultures and identities, liberal nationalists or communitarian political theorists still insist on the need to provide limits to the promotion of nationality – they do not believe that national majorities have an unlimited right, or can to do whatever it takes to promote or protect their nationality. As Taylor insists, the politics of 'cultural survival' cannot breach the fundamental 'rights and immunities' of its citizens.[29] Thus Taylor approves of Quebec's language and sign laws, which only infringed on the 'privileges' of its Anglophone minority, but would not approve of the breach of the basic rights of individuals. Gans (2003), meanwhile, extends the right to linguistic and cultural preservation to justify policies of 'nationality based priorities in immigration', such as prioritising French-speaking immigrants, but only extends this right to the extent that it serves practical rather than symbolic purposes, i.e. that it ensures critical mass for the public use of a language, rather than to project and preserve power.[30] Lastly, even if the nation is conceived of as 'cultural' or 'historical' rather than strictly

'political' (i.e. 'civic' or 'constitutional' nationalism), the identity of the nation must not be so thick that it excludes its citizens: it must be flexible enough that all citizens have an opportunity to identify themselves with it, and it must be able to be continually interpreted anew.[31]

## Responses to the Resurgence of Populist Nationalism

The normative study of nationalism took on increasing urgency following 2016. The electoral success of Brexit and Trump, as well as the rise in popularity of far-right parties across Europe, all contributed to the perception of nationalism as a legitimate threat or alternative to liberalism.

Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism* represents the contemporary shift within mainstream conservatism away from neoliberalism towards a populist variety of nationalism.[32] The book makes a full-fledged defence of the re-emergent nationalism, celebrating it as a noble stand against cosmopolitan imperialism, or 'globalism'. He claims that nationalism and globalism are the fault lines of contemporary politics, and that we cannot avoid choosing between the two principles: 'Either you support, in principle, the ideal of an international government or regime that imposes its will on subject nations when its officials regard this as necessary: or you believe that nations should be free to set their own course in the absence of such an international government or regime'.[33] Whereas liberalism focuses too narrowly on economics and security, nationalism recognises that nations provide citizens with an organic source of loyalty from that citizens derive duties and exercise the virtues necessary for liberty and self-determination.

While Tamir is less enthusiastic about the normative possibilities opened by the resurgence of nationalism, she also thinks of the new

nationalism as a rational response to excesses of globalisation. In *Why Nationalism* she argues that political preferences along the 'globalist'-nationalist divide are informed by social and economic class preferences.[34] Thus, far from being a return of unreason, the return of nationalism is a rational and morally legitimate desire among those dispossessed by the globalisation of the economy to seek a new social contract to answer to their needs. The task then is to 'stop the ideological pendulum half way' between 'neoliberal hyperglobalism' and 'extreme right-wing nationalism', by nurturing a 'committed nationalism… of mutual responsibility that places fellow nationals at the top of one's social priorities' and reestablishes solidarity between class lines while respecting liberal norms.[35]

Elsewhere, Tamir admits that the resurgence of nationalism can be attributed to a backlash against multiculturalism.[36] She outlines five stages of nationalism: from [1] the birth of a nation, where nation building projects are necessary, to [2] banal nationalism where the benefits of the nation building project has solidified and 'the national-cultural background turns transparent'.[37] This is followed by the stages of [3] multiculturalism and [4] diversity, where the national 'majority' accommodate and give representation to the rights and interests of non-majority identities, culminating in the goal of superseding the nation as such. Tamir thinks we are now in a fifth stage [5], 'post-diversity', in which the 'majority' nation finds diversity threatening and the 'balance of power tilts back from diversity to homogenization', as members becoming anxious of losing the benefits they gained in the first and second phases of nationalism. This phase is exacerbated (but cannot be entirely explained) by economic instability and austerity, and can occur in supposedly 'civic' nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which ultimately 'carry a cultural inheritance born in the period of nation building'.[38] Accordingly, times of homogeneity and stability will be more comfortable with diversity than periods of

diversity and instability. Tamir concludes that 'civic' nationalism or 'constitutional patriotism' cannot serve as panaceas for the dangers of nationalism because 'they offer far too thin a basis for social and political cooperation. This is why nationalism keeps coming back, pushing civic ideals aside, and making its way to centre stage. Those who know how to meet the needs it presents will be the winners of the coming decades'.[39]

Nodia agrees that modern liberal democracies should attempt to limit rather than root out nationalist populist movements.[40] He reasons that populism is endogenous rather than exogenous to democracy; we cannot get rid of nationalism or populism without getting rid of democracy itself.[41] Democracy refers to the Latin *populus* or Greek *demos,* which modern democracies understand as the nation (*Volk*). Rebellions of the people against elites, he concludes, are 'part of the *ethos* of democracy'.[42] Nodia has no specifics on how to counter this threat, but insists that 'if we want to preserve, develop, and advance liberal democracy, we must recognize democracy for what it is. We must stop trying to free democracy from the will of the people, and from the propensity that those same people have to care more for their homelands, traditions, and beliefs than for the homeland's traditions, and beliefs of others. Efforts to 'liberate' democracy from the people… will only generate more 'populist' reactions by even more angry majorities, leading to outcomes that none of us is going to like'.[43]

Other thinkers hope that the most recent wave of nationalism can be kept in check by supplanting ethnic narratives of national identity with civic ones. They argue that since nationalism is not natural, but instead a specifically modern understanding of collective identity, national identity itself must be malleable. Mounk and Braunstein, for example, seek to counter Trump's promotion of an ethnic/white conception of American national identity with a rhetoric that reframes the nation as an inclusive community.[44] Fukuyama, meanwhile, recommends a return to the politics of the recognition of universal dignity, based around a

unifying identity, to stem the tide of the identity politics of 'resentment,' which he claims now fuels both the political right and left. Fukuyama argues that we can attain these more comprehensive and unifying identities by promoting 'creedal national identities built around the foundational ideas of modern democracies' while pursuing policies that assimilate individuals around these identities.[45]

More controversially, Kaufmann argues that the new nationalism is driven by demographic anxieties, and maintains that rather than eradicating the centrality of ethnicity, we must make it a more open and accessible category. He claims that civic nationalism is unable to 'address the anxieties of conservative voters' or 'provide deep identity in everyday life,' while ethnic nationalism is so restrictive that it is 'clearly a non-starter'.[46] Instead, Kaufmann embraces what he calls 'ethno-traditional nationhood,' which 'values the ethnic majority as an important component of the nation alongside other groups,' who are welcomed into the majority ethnic group by identifying with its history and values.[47] He cites the examples of how Irish and Italian immigrants were assimilated into a broader 'white' American ethnicity that maintained WASP ethnic symbols, or Trump's Latino or Asian supporters who value white ethnic symbols as important to their own national identity. Kaufmann thus thinks a voluntary assimilationist solution can alleviate conservative anxiety by allowing them to see a future for themselves and their ethnic traditions despite inevitable demographic changes. To make this possible, he advocates slowing immigration to a level where immigrants are able to 'voluntarily assimilate into the ethnic majority, maintaining the white ethno-tradition.' Kauffmann's compromise of reduced levels of immigration is shared by many other recent writers, including Mounk, Tamir, and Fukuyama.

This begs the ethical question as to whether the latest wave of scholarship has been too ready to compromise with the demands of

ethnic/white nationalists. Will the attempt by theorists to assuage ethno-nationalist anxieties ultimately end up legitimising far-right discourse? Moreover, it is unclear whether questions previously raised by critics as to whether a liberal nationalism can avoid sliding into an excessively closed, chauvinistic, and discriminatory form of nationalism once set into practice have been adequately addressed. Scholars should keep these questions in mind lest they inadvertently provide normative resources for the very ethno-nationalism they wish to keep in check.

*This review is part of*
*The State of Nationalism (SoN), a comprehensive guide*
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## Endnotes

[1] B. Yack, 'The myth of the civic nation', in: *Critical Review* 10/2 (1996), 193–211.

[2] M. Machiavelli & D. Wootton (ed.), *Selected political writings* (Indianapolis, 1994).

[3] J.J. Rousseau & R.D. Masters (ed.), *The first and second discourses* (Boston, 1964), 160.

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[7] H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (5th ed. New York, 1960), 574.

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[9] See E. Kedourie, *Nationalism* (4th ed. Oxford, 1993).

[10] I. Berlin, 'Nationalism: Past neglect and present power', in: *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton, 1979), 425.

[11] See M. Sandel, *Liberalism and the limits of justice* (2nd ed. Cambridge, 1998); C. Taylor, *Philosophical Papers, vol. 2: Philosophy of the human sciences* (1985); A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Indiana, 1981); A. MacIntyre, *Is patriotism a virtue? The lindley lecture* (Kansas, 1984); M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York, 1983); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (3rd ed. London, 2006).

[12] Y. Tamir, *Liberal nationalism* (Princeton, 1993); D. Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford, 1995); D. Miller, *Citizenship and national identity* (Malden, 2000).

[13] Tamir, *Liberal nationalism*, 6.

[14] J. Habermas, 'Citizenship and national identity: Some reflections on the future of Europe', in: *Praxis International* 12/1 (1992), 1–19; M. Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the new nationalism* (London, 1993).

[15] Habermas, 'Citizenship and national identity', 3.

[16] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship* (Oxford, 1995); C. Taylor, 'The politics of recognition', in: A. Guttman (ed.), *Multiculturalism* (Princeton, 1994), 25–74.

[17] M. Canovan, *Nationhood and political theory* (Cheltenham, 1996); Yack, 'The myth of the civic nation'; B. Yack, 'Popular sovereignty and nationalism', in: *Political Theory* 29/4 (2001), 517–536.

[18] D.M. Weinstock, 'Is there a moral case for nationalism?', in: *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 13/1 (1996); Canovan, *Nationhood and political theory*; Yack, 'The myth of the civic nation'; Yack, 'Popular sovereignty and nationalism'; R. Beiner, 'Nationalism's challenge to political philosophy', in: *Theorizing Nationalism* (New York, 1999), 1–25; M. Moore, *The ethics of nationalism* (Oxford, 2001); C. Frost, *Morality and nationalism* (New York, 2006).

[19] Weinstock, 'Is there a moral case for nationalism?', 96.

[20] See Frost, *Morality and nationalism*.

[21] E. Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford, 1983).

[22] Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship*; Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*.

[23] M. Walzer, 'The new tribalism: Notes on a difficult problem', in: R. Beiner (ed.), *Theorizing Nationalism* (New York, 1999), 207.

[24] See C. Taylor, 'The politics of recognition', in: A. Guttman (ed.), *Multiculturalism* (Princeton, 1994), 25–74.

[25] C. Gans, *The limits of nationalism* (Cambridge, 2003), 4.

[26] Miller, *On Nationality*.

[27] Ibid., 186.

[28] Cf. W. Kymlicka, R. Johnston, K. Banting & S. Soroka, 'National identity and support for the welfare state', in: *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43/2 (2010), 349–377, which uses data to challenge this last assumption. Weinstock also critiques Miller's argument, claiming that the liberal idea of a legal right to redistribution is a sturdier basis for redistribution than nationalist fellow-feeling or sentiment (See Weinstock, 'Is there a moral case for nationalism?'). This skepticism of the need for modern states to be undergirded by national fellow-feeling or sentiment is shared by Mason (1999), who thinks a sense of belonging-together can be inculcated through public recognition and accommodation of non-'majority' communities. See A. Mason, 'Political community, liberal-nationalism, and the ethics of assimilation', in: *Ethics* 109/2 (1999), 261–286.

[29] See C. Taylor, 'The politics of recognition'.

[30] See Gans, *The limits of nationalism*; J. Carens, *Culture, citizenship, and community: A contextual exploration of justice as evenhandedness* (Oxford, 2000), chapter 5.

[31] Tamir, *Liberal nationalism*; Miller, *On Nationality*; E. Kaufmann, 'Liberal ethnicity: Beyond liberal nationalism and minority rights', in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23/6 (2000), 1086–1119; Frost, *Morality and nationalism*; D. Goodhart, *Progressive nationalism: Citizenship and the Left* (London, 2006); T. Modood, *Multiculturalism: A civic idea* (2nd ed., 2013). See Mason and Patten 1999 for a critique of the coherence of the liberal nationalist attempt to use *liberal* principles to justify *nationalist* policies of cultural preservation. Mason, 'Political community, liberal-nationalism, and the ethics of assimilation'; A. Patten, 'The autonomy argument for liberal nationalism', in: *Nations and Nationalism* 5/1 (1999), 1–17.

[32] Y. Hazony, *The virtue of nationalism* (New York, 2018).

[33] Ibid., 3.

[34] Y. Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton, 2019).

[35] Ibid., 182; 173.

[36] See Goodhart, *Progressive nationalism: Citizenship and the Left*; C. Joppke, *Is multiculturalism dead? Crisis and persistence in the multicultural state* (Malden, 2017).

[37] Y. Tamir, 'Not so civic: Is there a difference between ethnic and civic nationalism?', in: *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019), 428.

[38] Ibid., 429.

[39] Tamir, 'Not so civic:', 433. Cf. Modood's argument that multicultural citizenship needs to be buttressed by an inclusive national identity that does not erase the thicker cultural identities of either its 'majority' or 'minority' identity groups, but rather integrates both. Modood thinks that the appeal to nationalism is necessary, in part, because of his shared scepticism of constitutional patriotism and cosmopolitanism, which he thinks are not 'affective enough for most people, especially the relatively non-political, and especially at times of crisis. They are unlikely to hold people together and to give them the confidence and optimism to see through the present crisis of multiculturalism'. Modood,

*Multiculturalism: A civic idea*, 137. For a similar argument, see Goodhart, *Progressive nationalism*.

[40] G. Nodia, 'The end of the postnational illusion', in: *Journal of Democracy* 28/5 (2017), 5–19.

[41] C. Taylor, 'Nationalism and modernity', in: J. Hall (ed.), *The state of the nation. Ernest Gellner and the theory of nationalism* (Cambridge, 1998), 191–218; Yack, 'Popular sovereignty and nationalism'.

[42] Nodia, 'The end of the postnational illusion', 15.

[43] Ibid., 18.

[44] Y. Mounk, *The people versus democracy: Why our freedom is in danger and how to save it* (Cambridge, 2018); R. Braunstein, 'A (more) perfect union? Religion, politics, and competing stories of America', in: *Sociology of Religion* 79/2 (2018), 172–195.

[45] F. Fukuyama, *Identity: The demand for dignity and the politics of resentment* (New York, 2018), 166.

[46] E. Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, immigration and the future of white majorities* (London, 2018), 10-11.

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# State of Nationalism (SoN): Nationalism and Private Property

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This article reviews research on the relationship between property rights and nationalism. A property rights perspective to the study of nationalism is relevant to understanding the origins and development of nationalism and nation states. Yet, key theorists of nationalism have mostly ignored the relationship between property rights and nationalism, or looked at it only indirectly. There are a variety of ways in which ownership or possession more generally can be related to nationalism, for instance through colonialism, racism, and dispossession.[1] This review, however, in order to build a consistent perspective on the historical emergence of nation states and nationalism, will have its main focus on property rights, property regimes and state-building. The literature on state-building and democratization bears important insights about this relationship which can be applied to the study of nationalism. This review will therefore draw on such literature, in addition to works on nationalism where the topic of property has been mentioned, to show how an integrated property rights perspective to the study of nationalism may yield important insights to our understanding of nations and nationalism. The article is structured as follows. First, it offers a brief discussion of what property rights are and why they are key to understanding the long-term historical development of nations and nationalism. After this, it outlines the links between property regimes

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and the formation of nation states, followed by a discussion of the conceptual links between nationalism and private property. The final section offers some brief reflections on Marxism, property and nationalism.

## What are property rights?

Property rights are politically sanctioned rights that give individuals, groups or other entities rights of use over things and recourse to the exclusion of others. If person A has a property right over resource B, this then excludes person C from the free use of resource B. This, however, is not always so straightforward, and there are often exceptions to this. The modern state, for instance, sometimes has rights to encroach on the property of individuals, while in some property regimes, people may have rights to use land that somebody else owns.[2] Modern property rights are primarily defined by two main features: 1) that they are exclusionary rights, and 2) that they regulates relations between things and persons. Historically and geographically, there have existed many different kinds of property regimes. There are forms of collective property or state property found in the former Soviet Union, there is feudal property with overlapping rights and dues, and property regimes where rights of use are more important, or at least as important as rights of ownership.[3] There were also different kinds of ancient property regimes, such as those that existed in ancient Egypt and Israel, or in Babylon. These systems varied, but were generally marked by a combination of individual ownership rights and imperial or monarchical rights over land and property.[4]

Property rights structure the distribution of wealth, and since property rights regulate the use of resources and wealth; since they govern the access and use of the fundamental conditions of life, they also shape the

development of society in fundamental ways.[5] Robert Brenner has put it like this: 'different class structures, specifically property relations [...] once established, tend to impose rather strict limits and possibilities, indeed rather specific long term patterns on societies'.[6] Andrew Reeve further notes that there are three power relations connected to property rights: economic power, dominium over others and various forms of authority.[7] The power that property confers on individuals or institutions is connected to the exclusionary aspects of property rights. Morris Cohen, for instance, notes that it is the exclusive element of property that confers powers on those possessing this right:

> The essence of private property is always the right to exclude others […] if, then, somebody else wants to use the food, the house, the land or the plough that the law calls mine, he has to get my consent. To the extent that these things are necessary to the life of my neighbour, the law thus confers on me power, limited but real, to make him do what I want.[8]

Property may be understood as a medium of power, and it is a way of ordering and organizing the distribution of resources and wealth. For these reasons, property rights have a fundamental impact on the development of the economic, ideological and political power structures of any society. Nationalism and nation states are, among other things, about organizing and structuring such relations of power. Thus, an understanding of the nature of property rights is central to understanding some of the key underlying mechanisms of nationalism and nation-formation.

## Property regimes and the formation of states

In the literature dealing with the long-term development of nationalism and the historical preconditions for its emergence, little attention has been paid directly to the effects of property rights and property rights regimes. In Ernest Gellner's classic account of the emergence of nationalism for instance, the transition from agrarian to industrial society plays the key role.[9] Nothing, however, is said about how structures and ideas of property might have affected this transition. What role may the transition from agrarian to industrial forms of property have played here? It is clear that a transition from one type of society to another is central, and, at least if we follow classic materialist assumptions, as laid out for instance by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845), this should also in some form involve changing property regimes.[10] Other classic and established works on the historical emergence of nationalism are equally quiet about property rights. Michael Mann writes about the emergence of the modern (nation) state and nationalism, but pays little attention to how property relations might have influenced and shaped this.[11] Eric Hobsbawm focuses on the bourgeoisie, yet he does not discuss how actual patterns of ownership influenced the developments of nation states or nationalism.[12] Recently, Rogers Brubaker has published works that re-emphasise the linguistic-religious aspects of nations and nationalism.[13] Andreas Wimmer has also further emphasised the ethnic aspects of nations and nationalism, intertwined with the role of war and the state.[14] In all these examples, issues of property and property regimes tend to be in the background.

If the classic studies of nationalism have not dealt much with the issue of property, this topic *has* been handled in the related literature on the historical developments of the modern state and democratization. The classic work on historical development of the modern state and property rights is Barrington Moore's *Social origins of dictatorship and*

*democracy*.[15] In this book, Moore looks at how different agrarian property regimes affected the transition to industrial societies. One of the key points of the book is that property regimes of large and powerful landowners at the time of industrialization tended to result in totalitarian political regimes, while societies with an established bourgeois property structure at the time of industrialization tended to see a democratic state formation. Moore does not discuss nationalism as such, but it is clear that the different political regimes resulting from the different property regimes can be related to different kinds of nationalisms (liberal, authoritarian etc.). More recently, Andro Linklater, in his study of the emergence of private property and the origins of the modern world, has added strength to this hypothesis, by showing how different property regimes historically have resulted in quite different forms of rule and government.[16] Linklater focuses especially on how private property leads to a new way of understanding sovereignty as coming from the people. Again, this seems relevant for how different nationalisms understand and organize popular, national sovereignty, either understood in democratic, bottom-up terms, or in more totalitarian, top-down ways.

Classic theories of nationalism have tended to arrange forms of nationalism in different groups, such as eastern and western nationalism, or ethnic and civic nationalism.[17] One key question in relation to property, as I see it, is to what extent these different traditions coincide with the development of different property regimes, agrarian or industrial, collectivist or liberal. After Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history', the liberal, private property based nation state became dominant.[18] The point is, however, that the way in which property is organized, is connected to what kind of political forms and what types of civil society that emerges. As Kathrine Verdery observed just after the Cold War had ended:

> …classic liberalism saw a tight connection among certain understandings of citizenship, property, and identity […] In the socialist world, however, the predominance of collective property and the attempt to weaken possessive relations to individual selves precluded such forms of citizenship and identity.[19]

Some national histories have been more focused than others on how property rights regimes have shaped political and social development in individual countries. In America, it has long been suggested that the relative widespread ownership of private land ownership at the time of the American Revolution contributed to the development of a liberal nationalism there.[20] On a general level, Hartz argued that the lack of old feudal and aristocratic structures in the US led to a political ideological development that favoured liberal rights, and in particular the individual right to property as the basis for individual freedom. On the other hand, it has been suggested, in the form of the so-called *Sonderweg* thesis, that the more unequal distribution of landed property in the German lands was a contributing factor to the eventual emergence of totalitarian National Socialism.[21] Also, for a country like Norway, it has been suggested that the property structure of a wide class of small freeholding farmers formed the basis for a Norwegian liberal *Sonderweg* – a special path – of nation formation where democratic institutions, and later social democracy, became strongly established.[22] This can also be seen in various property regimes from places such as Latin America, Asia and Africa, which, historically resulted in different kinds of social and political organization.[23] It can also be noted, as Macpherson and Fuglestad have suggested, that labour power can be understood as a form of property, and that industrial and consumerist societies thus alter understandings of sovereignty and self-determination through forms of ownership and democracy that are not necessarily connected to real property.[24] More indirectly, nationalism scholar Miroslav Hroch has also pointed out the importance of different property regimes – through class

composition – for how nations form in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.[25]

## Scattered conceptual links

In the discussion above I pointed out (1) how classic theories of the emergence of nations and nationalism has tended not to focus on the issue of property and property regimes, and (2) how property regimes might in fact be central to understanding nations and nationalism. In this section, I shall discuss how connections between nationalism and property have been acknowledged in some studies, albeit, often without being systematically integrated into the general understanding of nations and nationalism.

There is a field of research dealing with so-called 'resource nationalism', where states or agents from a certain state seek ownership or control over natural resources, which is one way in which property rights and nationalism are connected.[26] Furthermore, property, especially in the form of land, has conceptual connections to state-building, and in particular to nation state-building. Andrew Reeve notes that:

Land provides the territorial dimension of the political unit. Modern states, at least, are defined in part by legal jurisdiction which they claim over a particular territory … land mediates, in this sense, between political power and individuals subject to it.[27]

It has also been pointed out by scholars that nations, as collectives, tend to claim property ownership over a certain territory. As Sam Fleischacker has noted:

> Nations ought to own a state; the state ought to own a certain territory; and the relationship between the nation and the

> territory will then be much like the one between an individual property-owner and his things: an opportunity for the nation to express its character or interests or beliefs in the shaping of the material world.[28]

Jacob Metzer and Stanley Engerman further suggest, based on connections between ownership of land and political power, that there is a relationship between ownership of property and sovereignty in nationalism. They write:

> While the ownership of land as prerequisite for enfranchisement has long been abandoned in modern democratic states […] this may reflect some kind of an accommodation between nationalism, whose basic attitude towards land as a place – a homeland belonging to the nationals – made the thinking often blur the distinction between sovereignty and ownership.[29]

They point out that the nation states that emerged during the first wave of nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century very often had property qualifications for participating in the national democracies, while at the same time claiming sovereignty, and thus ownership, over a particular territory of land.

Through this connection to sovereignty, nationalism is also linked to the idea of self-determination and notions of freedom and power, both within society and between nations.[30] Individual ownership of private property has a long tradition of being the basis for both citizenship and sovereignty. Property, especially property in land, represents what the Romans called dominium; it was the power and freedom of the aristocrats vis-à-vis the emperor. Ellen Meiksins Wood notes:

> The roman concept of dominium, when applied to private property, articulates with exceptional clarity, the idea of private,

> exclusive and individual ownership, with all the powers it entails, while the imperium defines the right of command attached to certain civil magistrates, and eventually the emperor himself.[31]

This legal distinction meant that the Roman Empire was, as Wood describes it, ruled by amateurs: it was an oligarchy of landed aristocrats. Property in land was the basis both of the aristocrats' rights of citizenship in Rome, and of their legislative powers, which they had by virtue of owning private landed property. Most of the nation states that emerged in the time of the American and the French revolutions were, similar to the Roman praxis, communities of propertied landholders.[32] Related to this, and following Benedict Anderson's famous concept of the nation as an imagined community, Bannerji et al. has asked whether 'the modern nation-state itself constitute the imagined community as property possessing subjects?'[33]

Bannerji et al. formulated their question in relation to nationalism, class and gender, and this indicates how issues about property can be interwoven with power structures within nation states that also defines relations between genders and other social groups. This can be extended to include racial constructions and relations to indigenous peoples.[34] I myself have asked to what extent the nation may be defined, on a general level, as a community of proprietors, to what degree the nation is an imagined and real 'propertied community'.[35] This is based on the idea of property as sovereignty, and that nationalism seeks to create national sovereignty through communities of property holders. This becomes particularly clear if we look at the historical period when the first nation states emerged, in the wake of the American and the French revolutions. The American and the Norwegian nation states that emerged then, for instance, were communities where ownership of land was the main prerequisite for enfranchisement, that is, for participation in national sovereignty. Equally important, and different from previous historical periods, they were communities where individual property was written

as a universal right for all the members of the nation through national laws made and guarded by men of property.

## The Marxian suspicion about nation and property

When discussing property rights and nationalism, Karl Marx must be mentioned specifically. The old Marxian suspicion that the nation state is nothing more than a 'committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' stands out (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*, ch.1). The bourgeoisie, as Marx wrote in the manifesto: 'put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors"' (ibid.) This is all part of what Marx saw as the natural progression of historical development; where complex feudal ties and property relations became dissolved into more straightforward bourgeois property relations of buying and selling. According to Marx, this simplified the class struggle by the creation of two main classes with the same formal rights within the framework of the state.

Other scholars in the Marxian tradition note that the nation state, whether ruled by the bourgeoisie or not, has had an effect of establishing formal equality of (property) rights. Hannah Arendt, for instance, in line with Marx's argument, points out that the nation state was marked by dissolving privileges of the aristocrats giving all members of the nation, in theory, the same rights.[36] In the slightly alternative school or strand of Marxism, C.B Macpherson discusses how the right to property is the most important of these rights, at least in liberal nation states. As he sees it, in an expansion of the Marxian view, the very ideological and practical foundation for these states is what he called *possessive individualism*. This is a philosophy in which every individual is the free proprietor of his person and may freely alienate his or her labour, which makes

possible the constant flux and change of social and economic relations between individuals that capitalism requires and which nationalism makes possible.[37]

This fluidity of social relations has been pointed to by many scholars of nationalism, most famously by Gellner in his emphasis on the mobility within the national community.[38] The nation, in a sense, as Liah Greenfeld puts it, elevates every member of the nation to the position of elite.[39] This may also be what Marx (again) hinted at when he, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), described the French peasants under Napoleon III as a sack of potatoes: they had been granted rights both of property and of voting – but rather like putting a bunch of potatoes in a sack, it meant grouping differently shaped entities and calling it a unit. This is just a crude way of saying that what the modern nation state does, is integrate different groups of people by giving them the same rights, beginning with the right to property. This is in line with classical works on political science where the integration of peasants and the working class into the state by gradually giving them more and more rights (where the right to property and the right to vote are key) has been a central topic. This has been outlined famously by Stein Rokkan in his collection of essays entitled *State, Nation, Class*.[40]

## Summing up

In this review I started by explaining how an understanding of property rights may be important in understanding the nature of nations and nationalism because property rights have a fundamental impact on the economic, ideological and political development of any society through its exclusionary nature. I then noted how a property rights perspective to the study of nationalism is a relatively new area of study, and that the subject has not been treated systematically in the literature on nations

and nationalism. The review then discussed relevant literature on state building, property regimes and democratization, pointing out how these studies can provide us with important insights on the relationship between nationalism and property rights – most importantly on how property regimes affect state formation and political regimes. This was followed by a review of central conceptual links between nationalism and property rights, pointing out how the notion of national sovereignty and ownership of property may be related, and indicating that issues of gender and race in nationalism may be informed by notions of property. In the last part of the review, I looked at some Marxist assumptions about property rights and nationalism and suggested that the establishing of private property rights and nationalism are strongly related.

There are central and important links between property rights and property regimes, on the one hand, and nations and nationalism, on the other. A future task would be to systematically integrate a property rights perspective into the study of nations and nationalism. This could advance our understanding of the origins and development of nationalism as historical phenomena, as well as giving insights into the internal logic of nationalism as an ideology.

*This review is part of*
*The State of Nationalism (SoN), a comprehensive guide*
*to the study of nationalism.*
*As such it is also published on the SoN website,*
*where it is combined with an annotated bibliography*
*and where it will be regularly updated.*

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*and co-editors-in-chief.*

## Endnotes

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# Book Review

Andreas Stynen, Maarten Van Ginderachter and Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas ed., *Emotions and Everyday Nationalism in Modern European History.* Routledge, London and New York, 2020. 224 pp. ISBN 9781032236476

The study of nationalism has of late been extending its explorations downward, from international relations and the state's public sphere into small-scale regional communities and, lately, into the private sphere and even the intimate sphere. 'Affect theory' – the study of unreflected emotional responses to one's social and cultural environment – has made it mark in nationalism studies, and a good example of this trend is the volume under review here.

How did people, actual individuals, actually feel about the nation? Was the collective discourse in public opinion a proper reflection of what people sensed in their own heart of hearts? Even to ask the question is to avert a certain scepticism on that score. The trendy approach of 'national indifference' forecloses that question in its very phraseology. Not unlike modern political distrust of the 'mainstream media', historians are often moved by an ingrained tendency to second-guess the official story and to seek proof that 'it ain't necessarily so'. Media reports of massive, fervent crowds enthusing about the declaration of war in 1914 are now suspected of being, at least in part, propagandistic 'fake news'. And so, in the realm of the emotions, too, there may be an a priori

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Joep Leerssen, 'Book Review: Andreas Stynen, Maarten Van Ginderachter and Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas ed. *"Emotions and Everyday Nationalism in Modern European History"*, in: *Studies on National Movements* 9 (2022)

tendency to explore this new source of information as a corrective to the established, collective, public frame.

Luckily, the present volume steers clear of such a reductive a priori. What we see here is really an ideological history from below (as the editors' afterword phrases it), dealing with political ideas rather than material living conditions, and realizing that most private testimonies were written by ordinary people for whom politics and the nation were a matter of spontaneous, emotional response rather than professional, expert analysis. When studying the impact of the national ideologies in private ego documents we encounter unreflected rather than analytical responses, and that is where emotions need to be factored into 'everyday nationalism'.

The chapters in this collection are arranged in roughly chronological order, taking the reader from the decades around 1800 to the post-1945 period. Various social groups are represented, from indigent paupers seeking financial support to soldiers. Some articles gravitate towards sociology: the appeals for sustenance analysed by Oddens seem to invoke charitable philanthropy rather than nationality, and Wiktor Marzec, in choosing to concentrate on issues as they presented themselves to workers in late-imperial Russian Poland, finds that these elicited class-defined and economic responses rather than nationality-driven ones. Others shed light on political ideologies like fascism. The testosterone-fuelled raging-bull fervour of Italian irredentists around Fiume/Rijeka (*Arditi*, indeed), well described by Blanck, presents an interesting counterpart to Cărstocea's analysis of the fey cult of the Fallen Warrior in Romanian fascism. Both articles offer powerful testimony that fascism is (as Goya's drawing already realized) one of those nightmare monsters produced by the somnolence of Reason: fundamentally predicated on the need to drown out rational thought and sober judgement, and replacing cerebral responses by hormonal ones. Against this background, the study of lyrical, poetic material (Kivimäki's

analysis of verse written by Finnish front-line soldiers) stands out as an intriguing internalization of the national affect long propagated by Finnish national romanticism and now suffusing even the very capillaries of the body politic. The chicken-and-egg question that the editors ask themselves (is the nation emotionalized, or are emotions nationalized?) here comes to a fine point. My own overriding impression was how easy the two 'click', how very close the family relationship between chicken and egg is. One would be hard-put to find poetry by Liberals expressing love and adoration of market forces. And even the literature of communism is Brechtian, epic, stern, un-lyrical.

How private emotions relate to the larger, public ideology – through what conduits individual affect and political agenda are communicating vessels: that comes into focus as an intriguing and complex field of research. One such conduit is that of pedagogics: sensitizing developing personalities to the allure of the nation. Josephine Hoegaerts studies testimonies from Flemish school classrooms; Martina Niedhammer looks at the lyrical, communitarian appeal of Mistral's Occitan dictionary - a case that could be applied to other cases, e.g. Dinneen's Gaelic dictionary and its widely-ramifying appeal to Gaelic revivalists in Ireland. Such further study could fruitfully factor in how Mistral and Dinneen transformed an earlier, philological, bardic and troubadour-oriented interest into a contemporary, rusticist, peasantry-oriented one, moving from antiquarianism to communitarianism.

The overall impression I took away from this rich volume is how very successful nationalism has been in winning individual hearts and minds. Evidence that in their private emotions people dissociated themselves from the public discourse of national loyalty is comparatively weak, and in many cases we can see that the collective public manifestations of national agendas could channel and collectivize, or cultivate, individually-held emotive support. Nationalism, in other words, is an

emotive ideology; something to ponder, since it may help to explain both its thin-centeredness and its powerful agency.

As a historian, I particularly liked Moreono Almendral's opening essay on ego-documents and the discourse of national character. But here and in this entire volume, I found one term missing which sharply focuses the historical and ideological relationship between affect and the nation. It is 'Romanticism'. As early as 1813, the Prussian general Neidhart von Gneisenau told his king Friedrich Wilhelm III that 'the security of the throne is founded on poetry'. From the very beginning of modern nationalism, Romanticism has been its powerful ambience and amplifier. Glorifying the agency of subjectivity; presenting natural human affects such as filial piety, parental love and homesickness as anthropological indicators that love of the fatherland is not a civic duty but a natural human instinct; that inspiration and enthusiasm tell us higher truths than rational cogitation; that fervour and passion are the heroic mode of proper citizenship; that the nation is best expressed in its native language and in poetry. All that legacy, traced in the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, suffuses the case studies assembled here; but the concept itself is strangely overlooked. In studying how affects and emotions went public and meshed with politics, surely Romanticism was the name of the game, and mentality history should not be neglected.

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# Book Review

Ludger Mees ed., *Héroes y Villanos de la Patria.* Tecnos, Madrid, 2020. 416 pp. ISBN 9788430979332

Some topics are timeless. As Europeans we used to see ourselves as living in a post-heroic age. But here they are back again. In a couple of weeks, we have been thrown into a political landscape inhabited by heroes and villains. And once again we are struggling to uncover the real face of the hero, to decode the intention of his message, the strategies deployed to convince the masses of his role as a savior of the Nation. The collection of essays coordinated by Ludger Mees offers an exciting insight in how the hero is socially constructed in a dynamic and dialogical way, never spared from the possibility of being degraded to the status of its counterpart, the villain.

At first glance, the collection of heroes assembled in this volume may seem eclectic, and in a sense, it is, but precisely the broad spectrum of historical cases throughout different geographic setting makes the strength of this book. Each individual case, presented as an isolated chapter written by a different expert, sheds light on specific mechanisms of hero-building in diverse historical and sociopolitical contexts. But, contrary to what the title may suggest, it is not so much the chosen protagonist of each isolated chapter – hero or villain – which makes the richness of this volume, but rather the complex web of transnational connections and disconnections that appears progressively throughout

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Christiane Stallaert, 'Book Review: Ludger Mees ed., *Héroes y Villanos de la Patria.'*,
in: *Studies on National Movements* 9 (2022)

the different chapters, as well as the growing consciousness of the fragility and contingency of the hero as a symbol of the nation.

In an introductory part, Ludger Mees sets the stage by reaching some theoretical and practical tools to understand what is meant by 'heroism' as the common thread throughout the range of cases analyzed in the book. Surprisingly, while the category of the patriotic hero is carefully elaborated, less or no attention is given to the definition of the 'villain', which appears indirectly evoked as a negative image of its glorious counterpart. The essays are the result of a research project conducted at the University of the Basque Country under Mees' supervision, which explains the dominant focus on case studies related to the Basque nationalist context. Some of the Basque patriotic heroes, such as Sabino Arana or José Antonio Aguirre, are relatively well known by the public. However, the whole of essays contributes to shed a new light not so much on the hero *qua* hero but rather as a historical figure inserted in a dynamic context of national and transnational, diachronic and synchronic ties and interactions. From chapter to chapter, pieces of this complex web are being disentangled thanks to the distinctive focus put on each single case.

The first essay is of tremendous relevance in today's Europe, as it analyses the multidirectional construction (and deconstruction) of the memory of the battle of Stalingrad, from 1945 to the present. By confronting the distinctive memories created by Germans and Soviets/Russians about this emblematic battle and its political (re)signification throughout time, Núñez Seixas shows very clearly the dependency of the hero/villain status on historical and political contingencies as well as the impact of visual culture (e.g. film making) on these dynamics. The pendular movement between both statuses, the elasticity or even ambiguity of the protagonists is the *leitmotiv* of the next chapters dedicated to the Spanish double spy Juan Pujol García (alias Alaric/Garbo), or to the mutual perception by Irish and Basque patriots

of their respective heroes. The category of the hero exceeds the individual and the local. Several chapters focus on collective heroism such as the soldiers victims of the battle of Stalingrad or the villain/hero status of Basque sheepherders in the United States as a result of chain migration from the end of the 19th Century. Even if some cases are more locally settled in time and place (such as the chapter on Basque medieval heroes between legend and history), the international, global context is never far away, as appears from the chapter on Nelson Mandela, who, as a symbol of peace and struggle for human rights, embodies the capacity of the patriotic hero to transcend the local and grow into a universal hero. An interesting *leitmotiv* throughout the book is the dialogic construction of heroism (and its inevitable counter-image, the villain), in a national as well as international context: Basques and Irish nationalists, Navarrese and Basques, Basques and Catalans, and so on. Obviously, no patriotism can exist or grow without interaction with other patriotisms, or, as the definition goes: in a sense, every nation is the product of nationalism. And so is the hero of the nation: a product of interaction with other heroes or even with his own counter-image, the villain, as viewed from the opposite side. Some examples are the cases of Germán Gamazo, José Sanjurjo Sacanell, José María Gil-Robles or Lluís Companys / José Antonio Aguirre.

Despite the open definition of the hero underpinning the broad range of selected cases, little or almost no attention has been given to women. The female heroine appears only once, to the end, and not as a real protagonist but as a theatre character shaped by the literary pen of the founding father of Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana. Given the focus on the Spanish context, with no lack of contributions by women to various heroic episodes of national or subnational history, the invisibility of women in the volume is unfortunate. At the outset, as a female reader I felt somehow uncomfortable with the subject – heroes and villains of the Nation –, which I identified as a masculine bias on history. But once I

started reading, this prejudice rapidly vanished. This book offers so much more than just portraits of selected heroes and villains. Instead, in many respects, it contributes to a better understanding of our 21st century which we naively thought of as post-heroic. Nevertheless, for a second edition, I kindly make a call for a fairer share for women. Whether in the role of heroines or villains.

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