

## **Croatian post-World War Two diaspora in Argentina: a community identity constructed around a trauma**

**Nikolina Židek, Associate Professor  
IE University Madrid, School of International Relations**

### **Abstract**

Fleeing troops of the World War Two Nazi-aligned Independent State of Croatia, accompanied by thousands of civilians, surrendered to the British Army and Yugoslav Partisans in Bleiburg, Austria, on May 15 1945. They were then repatriated to Yugoslavia by the Partisans and massively executed or transferred to labour camps. Those who managed to escape, found their refuge overseas, with around 10.000 Croatian exiles settling in Perón's Argentina in late 1940s.

While in Communist Yugoslavia Bleiburg was practically a taboo, the efforts in preserving the memory of Bleiburg were carried out by Croatian diaspora in Argentina since 1947, through pieces published in their journals and commemorations of the event held every year, even until today, 25 years after Croatia became independent from Yugoslavia.

This paper explores the tools of transmission of memory of Bleiburg in Croatian post-WW2 diaspora in Argentina in three generations. It is argued that, while preserving the memory of collective trauma of their fathers and grandfathers, the identities and lives of generations with no personal memories of the event are shaped by it. However, they reorganized this "postmemory" and downloaded Argentinean society's memory practices of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) as well as of other diaspora communities in Argentina, and incorporated them into the Bleiburg memory.

By way of conclusion the paper first explains the functioning of enclaves of memory of victims that preserve the reminiscence of a past traumatic moment and construct their identity around it. It then displays intergenerational transmission of collective trauma to reinforce a feeling of belonging to a community, by sharing an identity rooted in traumatic history. Finally the paper shows how collective traumas are preserved through family generations, but their perception is inevitably reinterpreted by new generations, while also influenced by the reality of the society where they live.