

ECHOES OF THE GREAT WAR: MEMOIRS AND LITERARY EXPERIENCE ON THE PHENOMENON OF ZELANI KADER AND MILITARY DESERTION IN CROATIA *

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Military collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of World War I, which accelerated during the last months of the 1918, resulted in widespread military desertion and a situation in which the deserters, returnees from military captivity and a large part of peasantry, which was weary of war-related hardships, formed a phenomenon marked by contemporaries as the Zeleni kader. In general chaos which ensued, the experience of war and anarchy was brought from the frontlines to the hinterland of Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia. This paper puts to the foreground the memories of war veterans connected to these events at the end of 1918 in form of memoirs, and literary expressions of the participants of the Great War, which supplement the image of general discontent, horrors of war and the collapse of the existing system. Contrary to often faceless documentation of the official authorities, memoirs and literary works, treated methodologically as historical sources and with employment of interdisciplinary approach, which considers the cognitions of literary theory, can elucidate the events linked to the Zeleni kader and its forms. Furthermore, this body of works presents us with an insight to soldiers' attitudes, their experiences of the war and motives for desertion, but also the subtle traces of mentality of all participants in these events at the end of the First World War.

Key words: Zeleni kader, desertion, memoirs of the veterans, literary expressions and the Great War

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Introduction

“It has been almost twenty years since the beginning of the World War. War experiences, images, names of people and places slowly disappear from memory – they are fading away, vanishing. However, some memories have cut deep into my soul and will remain there until death.”¹

In many ways instructive for the topic at hand, the words of the First World War veteran from the town of Otočac in Croatia, Frane Dubravčić, present us with an immediate and self-conscious account on one’s own recollections. It is precisely this form of literary narrative that sheds light on various aspects of personal experiences, usually missing from and – even more – misinterpreted in the official documentation dealing with the civil unrest and disorder ensuing at the end of the Great War in Austria-Hungary and embodied in the phenomenon of Zeleni kader in Croatia.² Historiography has dealt with the occurrence of the war-related violence in the hinterland of the Monarchy from various angles. As a direct consequence of collapse of the army, inevitable defeat at the front and flood of the deserters, the phenomenon of Zeleni kader is usually described as a state of violent outburst of discontent among those soldiers, peasantry and various outlaws who thrived in this state of disarray at the end of 1918.³

¹ Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je: Uspomene iz Prvoga svjetskog rata 1914 – 1918* (Rijeka, Otočac: Grafrade, Katedra Čakavskoga sabora pokrajine Gacke, 2002), p. 7.

² Although not confined to Croatian lands within the Danubian Monarchy, the Zeleni kader (equally often mentioned as Zeleni kadar), literary meaning the Green Cadre (green after the forests the participants usually took as refuge, and cadre as an unit or organized part of military operating behind the frontlines), was particularly active in the south-Slavic areas of Austria-Hungary. The term “Croatia” in this paper will be used as an equivalent to the continental areas of present-day Croatia, meaning the contemporary Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia.

³ The phenomenon of Zeleni kader has so far been covered through various aspects of historiographic research. More recent works by Željko Martan, “Ustanak ‘pokvarenih elemenata’ protiv ‘izrabljivačkih elemenata’: nemiri u sjeverozapadnoj Hrvatskoj potkraj Prvog Svjetskog rata”, Vladimir Huzjan (ed.), *Varaždin i sjeverozapadna Hrvatska* (Zagreb – Varaždin: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2014), pp. 593 – 634; John Paul Newman, “Post-imperial and Post-war Violence in South Slav Lands, 1917 – 1923”, *Contemporary European History*, 19 (August 2010), no. 3: 249 – 265; Tomislav Bogdanović, “Kategorije zelenog kadra 1918. godine i osvrt na njihovo djelovanje u Podravini i Prigorju”, *Podravina*, 12 (2013), no. 23: 96 – 108, show that the interest for the topic still results in historiographic research, even outside the framework of Croatian historiography. To mention only those works dealing specifically with Zeleni kader, and not those which marginally deal with it, here we should mention earlier historiographic attempts by Ivo Banac, “I Karlo je o’šo u komite: Nemiri u Hrvatskoj u jesen 1918”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 24 (1992), no. 3: 23 – 45; Ferdo Čulinović, “Zeleni Kadar”, *Savremenik*, 4 (1957): 124 – 142; and Bogdan Krizman, “O odjecima Oktobarske

Far from acting as a uniform group, the participants of the Zeleni kader had a wide array of motives for violent actions against the State apparatus, certain social groups and, basically, every form of power-holding centres, whether those were noble estates, rich merchants' shops, or railroad stations.⁴ Out of this reason, an individual approach to the first-hand experiences will give a clearer picture of participants' motives, frustrations and ideals. However, the methodological issues of memoirs as literary works and mechanics of their creation, is a complex topic, dealt vigorously with in both literary theory and historiography.⁵ For the purpose of this paper it is worth noting that the autobiographic accounts of the authors of the memoirs, in their literary form, should be viewed as stemming from both the actual events experienced, as the basis of those narratives, and the aesthetic (genre conventions) or ethic (social norms) reasons which conditioned the manner in which the authors conveyed their experiences to the audience.⁶ In other words, cultural, political

revolucije i zelenom kaderu“, *Historijski zbornik*, 10 (1957), no. 1-4: 149 – 157. The last two, however, bear significant methodological burdens of socialist Yugoslav historiography, and overemphasize the (marginal) influence of Bolshevik ideas on the main actors in Zeleni kader. Unfortunately, these views are sometimes still reproduced in modern historiography.

⁴ Perhaps the most instructive body of official source material, dealing with targets of the Zeleni kader, the burning problems of omnipresent pillaging, helpless officials and armed population, is the correspondence of local administrative units in the State of Slovenes, Serbs and Croats at the end of 1918. It was published by Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima u Hrvatskoj na kraju g. 1918“, *Historijski zbornik*, 10 (1957), no. 1 – 4: 111 – 129. Other source material is mainly inaccessible or destroyed to a considerable degree, see: Filip Hameršak, “Veliki rat ‘odozdo’ u hrvatskim autobiografijama“, *Hrvatska revija*, XIV (2014), no. 3: 14 – 16.

⁵ The literature for memory- and memoir-making, especially regarding the twentieth century conflicts and the First World War is vast. The most comprehensive work dealing closely with the topic at hand and based on a perspective of literary theory, is that by Filip Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa: Hrvatska autobiografija i Prvi svjetski rat*, (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2013). Slightly outdated work by Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), is still instructive for our understanding of the memory-making processes and has been reevaluated by Leonard V. Smith, “Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory: Twenty-Five Years Later*“, *History and Theory*, 40 (May, 2001), no. 2: 241 – 260. To mention further works related to this topic it would be necessary to name the following: Jay Winter; Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework“, Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Roger Woods, “The Conservative Revolution and the First World War: Literature as Evidence in Historical Explanation“, *The Modern Language Review*, 85 (January, 1990), no. 1: 77 – 91; Samuel Hynes, “Personal Narratives and Commemoration“, Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*; Aleksandar Ignjatović, “From Constructed Memory to Imagined National Tradition: The Tomb of the Unknown Yugoslav Soldier (1934-38)“, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 88 (October 2010), no. 4: 624 – 651; Adam Kożuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: the image of the Habsburg Monarchy in interwar Europe*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

⁶ See: Filip Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa*, p. 100.

and social context in which the author of the memoir or literary work lived in and produced his written account of the war, should always be considered because of its role in shaping the authors' perception for relevant and irrelevant or acceptable and unacceptable. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that stressful events, which the upheaval at the end of the 1918 definitely was for the contemporaries, leave dense memory traces.⁷ Bearing in mind this interplay between social norms as influential for narrative-making and personal recollections as a fabric of memoirs, the following analysis treats these accounts accordingly. This fabric of memoirs and literary works – experiences of the World War participants – will come in to the foreground as historical evidence crucial for our understanding of the presented topic.

Soldiers' Memories on the End of the War

The list of memoirs in Croatian, written by the veterans of the First World War, adds up to some twenty published works, and is introduced in Hameršak's overview of these autobiographic accounts.⁸ The fact that I will not consult all of those, should be explained here, because it may resolve the apparently provisory act of choosing the body of memoirs for my research. The memoirs consulted here provide us with quantitatively more observations regarding the failure of soldiers' discipline, military desertion and general discontent, which became characteristic for the late months of 1918 and the appearance of the Zeleni kader. An approach encompassing the whole body of available memoir literature unfortunately falls out of the scope of this paper, and the possibilities of quantitative analysis of recurring tropes, ideas and images in these works, should remain a topic for further research. Here however, noticing the attitudes which some of the veterans expressed in their accounts, and which are closely connected to our topic, present a much needed supplement to the achromatic content of the official documentation.

Although the issue of provisional selection of the source material (and this is not confined only to this case, but generally presents a deep methodological issue) still stands at this point, I argue that a more disputable aspect of the nature of memoirs, lies in the fact that they were written by individuals who are non-representative of the wider social and cultural basis, in other words, the authors of written accounts formed a 'high culture' discourse, which speaks

⁷ Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework", Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p. 17.

⁸ Filip Hameršak, "Priče veterana: Ulomci priča veterana Prvoga svjetskog rata", *Hrvatska revija*, XIV (2014), no.3: 59 – 69.

little of the illiterates' attitudes and fails to represent their point of view.⁹ This issue bears repercussions for our attempt to view the First World War from 'below', because of the different attitudes between the intellectual elite, who produced the memoirs, and the peasantry in general, who was the bulk of the Zeleni kader and the main actor of the upheaval at the end of 1918. However, the accounts which we will examine in this chapter, gain credibility as we take into account recurring tropes of violence, discontent and chaos, very apparent in official documentation and related historiographic research.

The soldiers' memoirs are abundant with the tropes regarding shortages of army provisions, which affected the troops' morale and presented a motive for disobedience and avoiding the military service. This pressing issue stimulated the negative impact on the army discipline. The example which vividly enforces this argument emerges from an episode at the Italian front which was recorded by Messner-Sporšić: "The colonel then ordered that the officers will have to stand by the cauldron with cocked revolvers, and shoot down anyone who would refuse to take food or complain about its quality. The soldiers immediately responded: 'Let them shoot, it's all the same to us, whether we get killed now or starve to death two months later.'¹⁰ These attitudes among the soldiers were an indicator of the Austro-Hungarian incapability to continue to wage the war, and, more fundamentally, to sustain the necessary level of army discipline. Another issue, emerging from the loosening of military grip on the soldiers' discipline, was the disappearance of the officers' authority. Frane Dubravčić, whose account is often permeated with ironic observations, remembered seeing a certain captain, who was injured by inhaling the poisonous gas after one of the many attempts to breach the Italian front, and commented on the captain's condition: "I wonder if the officer's drinking ceremony last night actually did him more harm than the gas in the no-man's land."¹¹ The resentment towards the officers was fuelled by yet another circumstance, which draws upon the national issues within the Monarchy, namely, the composition of the officer core, which favoured the German and Hungarian nationality. Messner-Sporšić argued that the success of the k. u. k. army in the early years of the war could have been ascribed to the hopes of different national groups for the political freedoms under the Habsburg rule, the idea which, according to his view, disappeared by the end of 1918. Elaborating his claim, he brought out his personal experience

⁹ This idea is a part of criticism of Paul Fussell's work, and is brought out in: Leonard V. Smith, "Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*", p. 243.

¹⁰ Ante Messner-Sporšić, *1915 - 1918 Odlomci iz ratnih uspomena* (Zagreb: Tipografija, 1934), p. 167.

¹¹ Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, pp. 117 - 118.

regarding these matters: "Before the offensive, you could hear orders issued in Hungarian, but after the battle, in the field hospitals, the groans and cries were in Slavic languages."¹²

The resentment which the soldiers expressed towards the army structures motivated many of them to employ all means at their disposal in order to avoid reenlisting. Even prior to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian military machine and the widespread appearance of desertion, the horrors experienced at the front presented for soldiers a good reason to avoid prolonged military service. In case of Vladko Maček's account, we are often left with an impression of him being an honest man and responsible individual, who aimed to contribute to, what was in his own view, a normal life in the unfortunate times of war. However, the experience of the front was obviously decisive for him to manipulate the military organisation in order to stay out of the battle. The fact that he was healed of his wounds, sustained at the Serbian front before the Christmas of 1914, presented a precondition for his return to the front. Nonetheless, contrary to the characteristic moral tropes within his narrative, he provided us with a typical account of the recruit aiming to avoid the trenches: "Since I had no great urge to go back to the front, I used the fact that my eyesight was not normal."¹³ The war experience obviously transformed Maček's perception of the military service, since he utilized his physical flaw to stay out of the conflict only after he conceived the reality of the war in Serbia.

By the end of the war, most of the wounded soldiers, along with those who were allowed their military leave, were naturally keen to stay out of the battle for good. In the late summer of 1918, Dubravčić felt that he had enough of trenches, shellfire and enemy assaults. The last chapter of his memoir, titled "I've had enough if war!"¹⁴, contains episodes of his attempts to stay at home, and to provide sufficient evidence of his incapability to serve in the army. In the following testimony, he attempted to appear sick at the medical examination, which would grant him further release from the service. In a concise description of this attempt we are presented with elaborate ways to deceive the army physicians:

I turned to my friends and asked them for a preparation which would make me ill. One gave me a caffeine powder which I was supposed to drink half an hour before the examination and thus cause arrhythmia. The other one offered me a medicine which would cause an artificial lung

¹² Ante Messner-Sporšić, pp. 182 – 183.

¹³ Vladko Maček, *Memoari* (Zagreb: Dom i Svijet, 2003), p. 60.

¹⁴ Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, pp. 151 – 172.

catarrh. The third one, my army companion, offered to give me a milk injection under the skin just before the examination, which would cause high temperature.¹⁵

This account, besides showing us Dubravčić's resourcefulness in the matters of avoiding the return to the front, indicates that these tricks were very well known among his acquaintances, who obviously experienced similar situations themselves during the course of war.

These tropes which illustrate the formation of soldiers' attitudes with regards to the conditions at the front, and hostility towards the army structures, pertain to the issues which emerged as the Austro-Hungarian State dissolved, and as the widespread appearance of the deserters ignited the upheaval throughout the hinterland of the Monarchy. The transition from passive insubordination to open desertion appeared as the outcome of the war became apparent, and the authorities lost the means of coercion. Dubravčić's examination did not go well for him; he was found healthy and was issued an order to join the march-battalion. However, he never saw the front again. As he was repeatedly proclaimed capable for military service, he lost his nerve with the latest physician he visited. Cursing the officers who managed to spend the whole war behind the lines and asserting his four-year experience of the trenches, he ended his visit with a threat: "So, if you obviously can't help me, I'll help myself! I'll join the Zeleni kadar!"¹⁶ The doctor was apparently stunned with his statement and proclaimed him ill and incapable for combat. This episode shows that at this point, in the late 1918, the regime dramatically lost the grip over its personnel, which was the main indicator of collapse and incapability to rein the ensuing upheaval.

Although the Austro-Hungary was not capable of sustaining resistance along the fronts by the end of 1918, the disintegration of the army, following the military defeat, was the final blow to the Habsburg Monarchy.¹⁷ The memoirs of the war veterans usually contain thick descriptions of the chaotic situation. Vlatko Uzorinac recollected on these events:

The breakup of Austria-Hungary in the October of 1918 primarily left an impact on the soldiers. One part of them dropped their weapons and left the units, while the others started to pillage the military and State magazines ... and drunk with the accomplished 'freedom' launched experimental assaults on private property. They were recklessly shooting their rifles

¹⁵ Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 155.

¹⁶ Ibid. 155.

¹⁷ David Stevenson, *With our Backs*, pp. 305, 532.

throughout the towns and villages, forcefully released criminals from prisons and committed various atrocities.¹⁸

These images of an overall breakdown are visible in other accounts as well, and contain similar tropes. Maček remembered that the Croat soldiers at the Italian front demanded from their officers to be taken away from the frontline, and, as the officers refused, they started to leave in large groups. As he recollects, he managed to gain control over his regiment, but only after promising the men that he would lead them to the hinterland, where everyone could find their way home. Furthermore, he remembers that everyone, including the men he was leading, was freely taking provisions from the military magazines.¹⁹ Messner-Sporšić, who was also returning from the Italian battleground, repeated these images of complete disorder in his own account. His observations are telling for the atmosphere in which the Austria-Hungary disappeared, but also speak about the attitudes which were crucial for the men participating in the Zeleni kader: "Thus, the nations of the former Monarchy parted from each other, and together left the old State, in which they could not achieve real social equality – not to mention the national freedoms!"²⁰ The demonization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire thus presented an important discourse in the narratives published in the interwar period, and Messner-Sporšić's account fits into the body of works which utilized on the alleged flaws in the Austro-Hungarian structure to explain the causes for upheaval at the end of the war, including the appearance of Zeleni kader.

However, the difference in political and social circumstances, as the factors which influenced the authors of memoirs, become apparent when their narratives deal with the ever-present topic of Bolshevik influences in the context of Austro-Hungarian breakup. The most obvious example of the stigmatization of communist ideology in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia influencing personal recollections of a war veteran is Ante Vrgoč's memoir. He was captured by the Russian troops at the Eastern front in 1914 and imprisoned, spent the years after his release observing the Russian revolution, reaching Vladivostok in 1920, where he finally started his voyage back to Croatia. His experience of the Russian revolution is charged with negative observations, and Vrgoč zealously emphasises his position as an inveterate anti-communist. Describing an episode in which an old acquaintance who recently became a

¹⁸ Vlatko Uzorinac, "Operacije naših odreda u Međimurju, Koruškoj i Štajerskoj godine 1918. – 1919", Petar Jelavić, ed., *Hrvati u borbama za oslobođenje sjevernih krajeva Jugoslavije: Međimurja, Prekomurja, Koruške i Štajerske* (Zagreb: Udruženje ratnih dobrovoljaca Međimurja, Prekomurja, Koruške i Štajerske, 1940) p. 123.

¹⁹ Vladko Maček, *Memoari*, pp. 66 – 69.

²⁰ Ante Messner-Sporšić, *1915 – 1918 Odlomci*, p. 193.

Bolshevik commissar, and whom he met in captivity, offered him the position of Soviet ambassador in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Vrgoč promptly transformed his account into a pamphlet-like narrative:

I immediately distanced myself and refused the offer, because I never was, and never could be a communist – because of the doctrine itself. Even if I was an enemy of the Tsarists, it does not follow that I was one of them [the Bolsheviks] ... Compulsion – that is the communists' programme! And can brute force resolve a single philosophical or scientific problem?! ... Communism is a movement without an ethical foundation, because its only tool is: violence and compulsion.²¹

Vrgoč's scolding of the Bolsheviks rendered his narrative acceptable with regards to the dominant anti-communist attitude in the political and public discourse in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The similar characteristics appear in most of the accounts published in the book of the Međimurje campaign (1918 – 1919) veterans' memoirs. For instance, Branko Svoboda recollected that the Croats in Međimurje were waiting for the remnants of organised Croatian troops to liberate them from the "red Hungarian hordes."²² Or Dragutin V. Perko's account: "The Bolshevik propaganda seized upon some of our [Croatian] areas as well, but failed to produce a deeper impact. It is because our troops had strongly developed national consciousness. The Bolshevik propagandists from Hungary had no luck with us."²³ Although it would be hard to claim that Maček's memoir, published in the United States as the Cold War progressed, is not subject to another form of ideological conditioning, his account on the issue is somewhat deprived of the moral judgement. As he caught up with the men from his regiment, who decided to leave the front, he observed that parts of it already acquired Bolshevik characteristics, with commissars at the head of some squads. He claimed that the main actors here were former prisoners of war, who were, after they had returned from the captivity in Russia, degraded in the Austro-Hungarian ranks, because they let themselves be captured.²⁴ Even though we are presented with the trope of the captured Austro-Hungarian soldiers at the Eastern front as the bearers of Bolshevik ideas, if we are to believe Maček's account, these formations soon disintegrated.

²¹ Ante Vrgoč, *Moje uspomene na svjetski rat* (My Memories of the World War) (Samobor: Tiskara Dragutina Spullera, 1937.), pp. 484 – 486.

²² Branko Svoboda, "S međimurskih polja" (From the Međimurje fields), Petar Jelavić, ed., *Hrvati u borbama*, p. 10. The obvious reference of the red colour is to the communist soldiers.

²³ Dragutin V. Perko, "Oslobođenje Međimurja" (The liberation of Međimurje), Petar Jelavić, ed., *Hrvati u borbama*, p. 103.

²⁴ Vladko Maček, *Memoari*, pp. 68 – 69.

Dubravčić's position however, should be interpreted with more caution, while no apparent influences shaped his narrative, besides the mechanisms of one's individual memory. As an account which was not intended for publishing by the author himself, but rather written for the needs of the author himself, his close family and friends, we are left with a memoir which was to a greater extent spared of social filtering. Regarding the Bolshevik influences, Dubravčić mentions them only once, and that is through evocation of civil attitudes towards that ideology. "For some nights in a row, you could hear the fusillade around the barracks in Špilnik, and later it moved towards the town. Everything was indicating that something was changing, but what was it to be? 'Hopefully not communism?' – the citizens anxiously commented, overwhelmed with fear."²⁵ For the reason he was under no censorship while writing this private memoir, and with no intended wider audience, we may ascribe certain exactness to Dubravčić's account, as far as the obstacles of his own memory permitted him to reproduce his individual experience.

Furthermore, the facts he brings out often correspond with the official documentation of the local authorities of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. Namely, Dubravčić was a witness of the Zeleni kader activities in the Otočac area during the late October and early November. Apart from mentioning the shooting at the Špilnik barracks, an event also recorded in the report dated 4th of November 1918, he was one of the organisers of the People's Guard and cooperated with the author of this official report, doctor Jovo Polovina, who was the president of the local People's Council Committee.²⁶ Through this interrelation between Dubravčić's memoir and official telegraphic correspondence, it seems plausible to establish basic means of evaluating the credibility of one's personal account of the past. Bearing this in mind, along the absence of any obvious political or ideological influence embedded in his narrative, this memoir certainly takes a specific place in this discussion. Apart from this, it may present an answer for yet another methodological dilemma, which is the historiographic use of autobiographic literature presented with an issue of "high culture" phenomenon distorting the image of "ordinary" people.²⁷

The blatant example of such division between the intellectual point of view and the attitudes of common people, comes from Maček's account of political changes and the establishment of the short-lasting government of

²⁵ Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 162.

²⁶ See: Bogdan Krizman, "Građa o nemirima", p. 119; Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, pp. 161 – 162. Dubravčić accounts for most of the personal names only with the initial letter, so here we are presented with a certain 'doctor P., who was a president of the People's committee', obviously referring to the author of the Otočac report.

²⁷ See: Leonard V. Smith, "Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*", p. 243.

the People's Council on the 29th of October 1918. He claims that the bulk of the population, primarily the peasants, observed sceptically as the tendencies to unite with the Kingdom of Serbia among the members of the new government became apparent. Maček remembers talking to a veteran coming from a peasant family who, although happy that the Hungarian yoke was over, asked him: "Do you think, captain, that it will be better now; don't you think that the Serbs will mount us now?" Expressing his admiration for the veteran's discernment, Maček cited Montesquieu: "I really like talking to a peasant. He is not learned to such a degree, where he could make erroneous conclusions."²⁸ It would seem appropriate to conclude that the literate elite in this case failed to represent the view of those who left no written record of their own. However, pointing back to Dubravčić's account, we can again compare it to the available official documentation in order to get some sense of credibility in this context. The period of widespread upheaval and the peak of Zeleni kadar's activities in the area around Otočac are thoroughly recorded in his memoir; he remembers the situation on one public assembly organised by the local officials on the 30th of October:

They [the officials] read the telegrams informing about the composition of the new government in Zagreb. When someone from the crowd asked what will happen with the Zeleni kadar, I asked for the word and said: "Brothers, the war is over. The credit for its outcome also belongs to those soldiers who left the front and went to the green hills. So, they contributed to the ending of the war, saved themselves, and now they have to return to wherever the war had banished them from. They have to return to their homes and families. They've done their part. Therefore, let all of you inform your kin, to safely return to his home, and that nothing will happen to him!"

"Long live the Zeleni kadar!", the cries spread through the hall.

Then one peasant from Staro Selo, Miljan Rus, asked to speak: "But gentlemen, what will happen with rakija baking?"²⁹

"Bake, Miljan, as much as you want. It's freedom now!", the others responded.³⁰

With the images emerging from this episode, it is hard to distance ourselves from the impression that Dubravčić provided us with an unbiased narrative of the turbulent period in the fall of 1918, and that in this case the voices

²⁸ Maček, *Memoari*, p. 75.

²⁹ The process of distilling home-made brandy (rakija) is commonly referred to as baking.

³⁰ Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 161.

of the illiterate majority are not distorted through an intellectual's point of view. The attitude of the common people, expressed at the end of this account with the sentence 'It's freedom now!' was usually misunderstood by contemporary officials and scorned upon by interwar intellectuals.

Literary Representations and War Experience

However, the gap between intellectual remarks and popular attitudes towards the war, 'high culture's' capability to express the anonymous voices of the common people, takes on different meaning in literary works. Here, Miroslav Krleža and Jaroslav Hašek, who both participated as soldiers in the war, will be juxtaposed to Stefan Zweig's literary representation of the Austria-Hungary. These accounts will present us with a form of literary memory of highly interpretative character, which, besides the issues of individual memory, introduce the problems of literary representation and author's backgrounds. These two issues, as I will show, are bound together, as literary work of the author speaks of his life, and his underlying experience influences the ideas present in his work.³¹ The analysis of the difference in author's attitudes to the war and legacy of Austria-Hungary, will point to the relevance of war experience, which was one of the features the Zeleni kader carried and brought to the people of Croatia and Slavonia.

The concern over the soldiers' destiny in the Great War, although in a rather different literary fashion, was therefore characteristic for Krleža and Hašek, who served in the Austro-Hungarian army themselves. Krleža's rebellious nature was probably the reason for his attempt to join the Serbian army – as a protest to the Austro-Hungarian State – shortly before the outbreak of the war, but upon his return to the Monarchy, he was drafted into the military to fight for the Habsburg cause in Galicia in 1915. After spending some time on the first lines, for the reason of bad health, he was sent back to the rear, where he experienced the poor life conditions in military hospitals.³² Hašek's war experience was somewhat different. Although, similarly to Krleža, drafted into the k. u. k. army and sent to the Eastern front, he was soon captured by the Russians and returned to Prague only in 1920, after participating in the Bolshevik revolution.³³

³¹ Roger Woods, "The Conservative Revolution and the First World War: Literature as Evidence in Historical Explanation", *The Modern Language Review*, 85 (January, 1990), no. 1: p. 78.

³² Daniel Gerould, "Miroslav Krleža; A Croatian Writer against War", *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 25 (September, 2003), issue 3: 132 – 133.

³³ For Hašek's detailed biography, see: Cecil Parrot, *The Bad Bohemian: A Life of Jaroslav Hašek Creator of the Good Soldier Švejk* (London: Bodley Head, 1978).

The soldiers' life in the World War I and their attitudes become apparent in the works of these two authors. Kožuchowski described Hašek's main character, Josef Švejk,³⁴ cunning, adventurous and philosophical as no other Austrian soldier, through which Hašek mocked the anachronisms of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.³⁵ However, the literary tropes emerging in the narrative of his work, point to Hašek's war experience and remind us of various features commonly shared among the soldiery. Permeated with sarcasm and cynical observations, his account reminds us of the soldiers' attitudes regarding the war; when Švejk is asked by his superior, lieutenant Lukáš, if he is happy with the fact that they will together go to the front, he ironically responds: "Humbly report, sir, I'm awfully happy ... It'll be really marvellous when we both fall dead together for His Imperial Majesty and the Royal Family..."³⁶

Since it would be hard to even mention all the episodes where Švejk avoids the punishments indented for him by the military authorities and where Hašek obviously mocks the regime juxtaposing an 'idiotic' soldier to the administrative labyrinths and finally shows him as successful, here we shall mention another episode which regards our concern for the attitudes among the 'ordinary' people under the millstone of the World War. Getting lost on his way to Budějovice, where he was supposed to join his regiment, Švejk experiences the life in the wartime hinterland. The accordion player he met on the way took him for a deserter, and offered to hide him with his sister: "She has been keeping her husband hidden in a stable for two months already – he confined to Švejk – so she can hide you too and you'll be able to stay there until the end of the war. And if there are two of you it'll be jollier." After refusing this offer, Švejk encountered an elderly man who also took him for a deserter and who started to complain about the "robbers, vagabonds and thieves, masses of whom were infesting the whole district of Písek. "They run away from the army, they don't want to serve in it and they roam about the whole district and steal."³⁷

With this reference to the appearance of deserters in the hinterland of the Monarchy, Hašek draws upon his own experience, and points to the fact that the phenomenon was a common trope throughout the Monarchy during the Great War. In Krleža's case, the fates of soldiers are embedded in the contrast of the mechanisation of the war against the tormented human individual.³⁸ In

³⁴ Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk and his Fortunes in the World War* (London: Penguin Books, 1974).

³⁵ Adam Kožuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary*, pp. 111 – 112.

³⁶ Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, p. 213.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³⁸ Tode Čolak, "Ratna lirika Miroslava Krleže", Marijan Matković, ed., *Miroslav Krleža 1973*, (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1975), p. 67.

a short story *The Battle of Bistrica Lesna* Krleža introduces us with his cynical tone:

This history of one detail of the battle of Bistrica Lesna is written in honour of late sir corporal Pesek Mato and six dead Home-Guards of the second battalion of the second company, namely: Trdak Vid, Blažek Franjo, Loborec Štef, Lovrek Štef, Pecak Imbra and Križ Matija, who all fell in a heroic assault on the hill three hundred and thirteen, thus spilling their Royal Hungarian Home-Guard blood for the glory of the thousand-year old Kingdom of Saint Stephen, in accordance with the Hungarian-Croatian compromise of 1868. May they rest in peace!³⁹

The similarity with which Hašek and Krleža employ the phrases of glory, honour and courage, embedded in the Austro-Hungarian war propaganda and viewed by many as vague and pointless, speaks of their attitude as veterans to the image of Habsburg dynasty and points to the issues which fuelled the discontent and anger among the soldiery.

However, Krleža's concern with the inevitable fate of an ordinary soldier takes on fatalist features and lacks much of Hašek's ironical style. Still, the images which are relevant for our understanding of this topic emerge as the individuals swallowed by the war speak of Krleža's understanding of soldiers' psychology. In the midst of an open charge, one of the heroes of the mentioned novella, Štef Loborec, faces his death and is overwhelmed with anger:

To whom did he ever do wrong? It was him who was deprived of his six-week leave, and they pushed own wife with a gunstock away from him at the barrack's fence! They have scarified him, dragged him around the hospitals, stole his shoes, and now they're firing at him? Who is that pig which dares to fire at him? Let's see Štef Loborec, will he stand this for long, that just everyone pounds at him?⁴⁰

These concerns escalating to anger, which the soldiers commonly shared, particularly the deprivation of the army leave, also apparent in other testimonies,⁴¹ speak of Krleža's capability to represent the troubles, which those who were forced into the conflict, had to bear with. Although a definite connection between Krleža's and Hašek's views with the general attitudes of the Austro-Hungarian troops cannot be established here, the war experiences they shared with other soldiers, each in his own sense, shaped their narratives and

³⁹ Miroslav Krleža, *Hrvatski bog Mars* (Zagreb: Zora, 1965), p. 9.

⁴⁰ Miroslav Krleža, *Hrvatski bog Mars*, 39.

⁴¹ Particularly in Dubravčić's testimony, where he repeatedly aims to avoid going back to the front after his military leave.

emerged through various episodes and literary tropes, as a testimony to their acquaintance with the soldier's psychology.

In order to understand the weight of such experience for the shaping of one's literary work, here we should introduce Zweig's recollections in his autobiographic novel to the narratives of Krleža and Hašek. Being a part of Jewish intellectual elite and a class protected by the sacralised person of the Habsburg Emperor,⁴² Zweig failed to state his position regarding the human suffering and meaninglessness of the war, which was experienced by a large majority of the people in the Austria-Hungary. In his *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig admits that "in order to describe the war in a poetic synthesis, I lacked the most important thing: I had not seen it."⁴³ However, his subsequent war experience was formed only as he was travelling to Budapest and encountered the hospital trains returning from the front:

But the worst of all were the hospital trains which I had to use two or three times. How little they resembled the well-lighted, white, carefully cleaned ambulance trains in which the archduchess and the fashionable ladies of the Viennese society had their pictures taken as nurses at the beginning of the war! What I saw to my dismay were ordinary freight cars without real windows, with only one narrow opening for air, lighted within by sooty oil lamps. One crude stretcher stood next to the other, and all were occupied by moaning, sweating, deathly pale men, who were grasping for breath in the thick atmosphere of excrement and iodoform ... Covered with blood-stained rags, the men lay on straw on the hard wood of the stretchers, and in each one of the cars there lay at least two or three dead among the dying and groaning.⁴⁴

Being the sole account of this sort of war-related experiences in Zweig's book, it speaks of the fact that his main concerns were those of giving a testimony of a safe life in the Habsburg Empire, presented through a nostalgic tone of his narrative and regret for the late Austria-Hungary.

Taking into consideration that even the scenes from the hospital trains affected Zweig heavily, the striking difference between his literary accounts, as opposed to Krleža's and Hašek's, may have originated from his own detachment from the reality of the front, which he never experienced. The nostalgia for the Habsburg dynasty, and even thrill which he felt at the beginning of

⁴² Leon Botstein, "Stefan Zweig and the Illusions of the Jewish European", *Jewish Social Attitudes*, 44 (Winter, 1982), 67.

⁴³ Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 246.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

the war,⁴⁵ stand in sharp contrast with Krleža's and Hašek's position. Krleža would directly address such attitudes, asserting the contemporary literary anachronisms: "What is fashionable in the European literature today should be named Zweigery [Zweigovština] ... And why for the devil's sake do we need these sweet-glazed pretzels of that kind of literature as Zweig's is? Steiermark zither. For spinsters. For cretins. People are sitting in dugouts, shooting at each other and reading Zweig."⁴⁶ The alienation of Zweig's literature from contemporary attitudes, present among the soldiery and general population, is also, although indirectly, mocked by Hašek. In an episode where Švejk meets an overenthusiastic Austrian recruit Biegler, the nonsense of glorification of the Austrian cause, which Zweig obviously approved of, is given through a ridiculously long list of book titles, which Biegler hoped to turn into great works:

The Characters of the Warriors of the Great War. – Who Began the War? – The Policy of Austria-Hungary and the Origin of the World War ... The Glorious Day of Austria-Hungary. – Slav Imperialism and the World War ... Our Dynasty in the World War. – People of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy under Arms ... How the Enemies of Austria-Hungary Fight. – Who will be the Victors? – Our Officers and our Men. – Memorable Acts of My Soldiers ... The Book of Austro-Hungarian Heroes ... The Heroes of Our March Battalion ... Forward with the Sons of Austria-Hungary! ... Faithful Sons of the Fatherland ... Blood and Iron. – Victory or Death. – Our Heroes in Captivity.⁴⁷

Ridiculing the war propaganda in this fashion, Hašek transformed his individual experience and attitude as a veteran into a satiric work, and emphasised the irrelevance of such notions for many common soldiers as the war affected their will to fight and loyalty to the State.

The interplay of war representation and personal experience in the cases of Hašek and Krleža closely resemble the atrocities with which the soldiers were faced in the war. The discrepancy between the officer core and ordinary soldiers, emerges again through painful images in Krleža's novella *Barrack Five B*, where a Croatian recruit Vidović is lying wounded in the barracks:

⁴⁵ Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, p. 224.

⁴⁶ Miroslav Krleža, *Pijana novembarska noć 1918. i drugi zapisi* (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 1973), p. 16.

⁴⁷ Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, p. 489 – 490.

Vidović heard the clank of glasses in the summer house and recognized the voice of the count commandant

...

- I have already gone mad! I already wanted to pray! Oh! And they're outside singing! Really! They're celebrating victory! And this Maltese knight is holding a speech...

- What's happening with number nine? He has plucked his cannula out of his neck! He's bleeding! Sister!

...

Outside, in the summer house, on the other side of the whitewashed planks, glasses clanked, and here number nine plucked out his cannula in agony and blood started to flow. Number nine breathed heavily, rattling like a slaughtered pig, and then more silent and silent...

Vidović wanted to scream but he could not find his voice.

...

- Number nine died! Number nine died! And these cavaliers are outside, singing and clanking their glasses! Fr. Giovanni Batista a Santa Croce! Let me see him! Let me see the Cavalier from Malta...

And in the trance of his final effort, which was actually already a spasm of death, Vidović rose like a spectre and tore the curtain above his head! There was a square of light and in the bright-green illumination through the leafage of the summer house, white ladies with crosses could be seen, half drunk, laughing, loud, future mothers of future butchers.

- Poof! – Vidović wanted to shout, and he even had a bright idea of throwing his porcelain pot full of mud on that white tablecloth and soil everything – to soil, to leave a horrible stain on the tablecloth, so everyone screams: Stain, stain!

In the realization of his last pathetic idea, Vidović bent to reach his container, and, while falling, he already felt how his hands mired into the horrible matter – and everything was drowned in a torrent of blood.⁴⁸

The motive of suffering soldiers, juxtaposed to the easy-living officer core, played a significant role in the soldiers' attitudes towards the military and State authorities and subsequently fuelled the violence embedded in Zeleni kader. Experienced by Krleža in this manner, the tropes of inequality in the army enhanced the negative perception of the authority by the peasantry,

⁴⁸ Miroslav Krleža, *Hrvatski bog Mars*, p. 289 – 290.

which already formulated its discontent – even before the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian regime. The following verses were recorded in Krleža's memoir, *Distant Days*,⁴⁹

Emperor Charles, and Empress Zita! Why do you wage war, if you have no wheat?

or:

Franz Josef bought some petrol, his Empire ended up on auction...⁵⁰

With these popular jests, originating in the late months of 1918, and which Krleža viewed as typically *zelenokaderaški*,⁵¹ we are presented with a typical picture of peasant attitudes towards the regime, which, combined with the experience that the deserting soldiers brought, formed a basis for the eruption of anger and the emergence of the Zeleni kader phenomenon.

The case of apparent misconception of freedom by the peasantry, apparent in a large body of official documentation regarding the Zeleni kader activities at the end of the war,⁵² points to the value of literary representations of these same events. With a clear reference to the actors of Zeleni kader, Dobriša Cesić idealized this vague notion of freedom in a poem:⁵³

And often, when I lie in the night,
I feel a strong urge for flight.
Where? Let the occasion set the course:
that's a vigorous song within me
of an old, dead deserter.
And he sings, sings of freedom
without frontiers,
and how the great forests
are more beautiful than the fields,
and how it's lovely, and how mad

⁴⁹ Miroslav Krleža, *Davni dani* (Distant Days) (Zagreb: Zora, 1956).

⁵⁰ In Croatian: *Care Karlo i Carice Zita, što ratuješ kada nemaš žita?/Franja Josip kupio benzina, na bubanj mu ode carevina...* Miroslav Krleža, *Davni dani*, p. 356 – 357.

⁵¹ Meaning: that which bears the characteristic of the Zeleni kader.

⁵² See: Bogdan Krizman, "Građa o nemirima", pp. 120, 122, 128; Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", p. 619.

⁵³ This is the last part of the poem. The previous verses contain notions of freedom and flight (escape). This is my free translation, since the work is, unfortunately, not translated to other languages.

- Hey! -

to cast away the chains.⁵⁴

It would be hard to dismiss this poem as a piece of work with no relevance for our understanding of the desertion at the end of the First World War, since the obvious inspiration for the author was a “free” deserter in the Zeleni kader.

Conclusion

The fact that the memoir literature and literary representations of the war are mostly (except Hameršak’s work) absent in historiographic research on this topic, presents an issue which will have to be addressed in further research. With further methodological development and interdisciplinary approach, primarily taking into consideration literary theory, these works can provide historians with a clearer picture of soldiers’ attitudes, popular mentality and abrupt outburst of violence which took place throughout the Monarchy at the end of 1918. Memoir literature on the First World War in Croatia and the activities of Zeleni kader contains thick descriptions of these events. Provided that other types of source material are consulted, and the context of time – cultural, social and political basis – in which those accounts appeared, is taken into consideration, this body of literature can point us to various aspects which are usually neglected and misinterpreted in the official documentation.

Although an idea of hard historical evidence in this case is still farfetched, we should not neglect the fact that the presented particular memories, tropes and imagery draw upon the period of Zeleni kader’s activities. With literary representations of the past, and written manifestations of memory, this attitude is fundamental, and can open new possibilities for historiographic research. Further research and debate could perhaps render Cesarić’s poem, as romanticized it may be, and along other literary manifestations of war experiences, luminous for the ideals and thoughts which the deserters and peasants of the Zeleni kader actually cherished.

⁵⁴ Dobriša Cesarić, “Predi”, Marin Franičević, ed., *Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti* (Five Centuries of Croatian Literature), vol. 113 (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1976), p. 89. Original verses: *I često, kad u noći ležim/Osjetim silnu čežnju da bježim./Kud – neka slučaj odredi smjer:/To u meni pjeva zanosom svježim/Stari, mrtvi deserter./I pjeva i pjeva os lobodi/Bez granica/I kako su ljepše velike šume/Od oranica,/I kako je lijepo, i kako je ludo/-Hej!-/Rastrgati rudo.*

Echos des Großen Krieges: Memoires und literarische Erfahrungen über das Phänomen des Grünen Kaders und Desertion in Kroatien

Zusammenfassung

Militärischer Zerfall der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges, besonders bemerkbar in den letzten Monaten des Jahres 1918, verursachte weitgebreitete Desertion und eine Situation, in der Fahnenflüchtlinge vom Kriegsschauplatz, Rückkehrer aus der Militärgefangenschaft und ein großer Teil der kriegsmüden Bauer, ein Phänomen bildeten, das von Zeitgenossen Grüner Kader genannt wurde. In dem eingetretenen allgemeinen Zerfall wurden die Erfahrungen des Krieges und der Anarchie vom Kriegsschauplatz auf die mittleren Gebiete des Königreiches Kroatien und Slawonien übertragen. In dieser Arbeit werden die mit diesen Ereignissen vom Ende des Jahres 1918 verbundenen Erinnerungen der Kriegsveteranen in Form von Memoiren sowie literarische Aufzeichnungen der Teilnehmer des Großen Krieges, die die Bilder der allgemeinen Unzufriedenheit, der Gräueltaten des Krieges und des Verfalls des bestehenden Systems verdeutlichen, in den Vordergrund gestellt. Im Gegensatz zu den oft monotonen Dokumenten der offiziellen Behörden, können die Memoiren und literarische Aufzeichnungen, wenn sie methodologisch korrekt in einer interdisziplinären Perspektive unter Benützung der Erkenntnisse der Literaturtheorie geforscht werden, die mit dem Phänomen des Grünen Kaders verbundenen Geschehnisse und seine Erscheinungsformen erläutern. Diese Werke ermöglichen uns die Einsicht in die Auffassungen der Soldaten, in ihre Kriegserlebnisse und Motive für Desertion aber entdecken auch subtile Spuren der Mentalität der Teilnehmer an diesen Geschehnissen am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges.

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