

FEAR, HUMANITY AND MANAGING THE HERITAGE OF WAR: TWO NARRATIVES FROM WESTERN SLAVONIA

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Using the concepts of affective community (Ahmed 2015; Hutchison 2016) and affective management of “war heritage” (Logan and Reeves 2009; Gegner and Ziino 2012; Lončar 2014; Stubić 2019), the article examines how social subjects in Western Slavonia – a microlocation with many places of memory and a dense accumulation of historical traumas within them – are constructed as resisting and/or conforming to the dominant hegemonic policy of remembering the Homeland War as the “cornerstone of reasoning” in Croatia (Blanuša 2017). The examples analysed range from the activities of a local “memory agent” and the founder of a digital archive of local history to the reception of a book of testimonies and a documentary on the humanity of Pakrac’s medics in the war (*Lessons on Humanity*, 2017 and 2019). Based on these examples, I identified different strategies of cultural, pedagogical and ideological re-presentation and re-animation of local war heritage in the social and digital environment. These strategies are different responses to the fear that the feeling of social connection to war events and veterans as symbols of national unity and pride has been ebbing away. However, there has also been a noticeable shift on the Croatian (semi-)periphery from a ceremonial commemorative culture to a digital culture of memory of war, fostered by affective communities which transcend local, ethnic and generational boundaries. The second shift is semantic – the tendency to replace victimological and triumphalist war narratives with those of “humanitarian heroism” and positive war stories about humanity, about helping and rescuing people from the “enemy side”. In conclusion, even though the Croatian “social framework of memory” (Halbwachs 2013) offers different models for transforming fear, pain, violence and the trauma of war into “cultural heritage”, only individuals remember and feel, and very few among them become memory agents and activists of “mnemonic resistance” (Molden 2016) with a significant role in the struggles over the meaning of the past.

Keywords: anxiety and fear, affective community, the heritage of war, digital memory, narrative memory, stories of humanitarian heroism

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOACOUSTICS OF THE POST-WAR PERIOD: “THIS, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE MEASURED”

*Some things cannot be put into words... one must feel /
Some things cannot be recounted... one must listen¹*

Despite² similarities between war-scarred areas – uniformly marked by impoverished urban centres and desolate rural outskirts, dotted with ruins which have yet to be cleared, homes put up for sale for next to nothing, currency exchanges and second-hand shops, spruced-up cemeteries and renovated churches, half-empty schools and the rare successful business zone – all of the places in the Croatian hinterland which have been affected by conflict and the difficulties of moving on from their wartime past have done so in their own distinctive way. Scars in the landscape have certainly left their mark on the bodies and psyche of the local people, while precarity, poverty and existential insecurity affect their impressions of the natural environment, wartime ruins and abandoned industrial facilities from the socialist era. The process of studying how the heritage of war affects the construction of affective communities – post-political communities which bring individuals together “in a way that enables one’s normal life and social world to make sense again” (Hutchison 2018: 81) and not on the basis of predetermined categories such as ethnicity, religion, profession or generation – began in Pakrac, Lipik and the surrounding areas, initially during my medical visits to the Special Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation in Lipik between 2016 and 2018, and then later as part of the “Narrating Fear” (2017 – 2020) project. I was interested in the various phenomena of post-war everyday life: “confessional culture”, “culture of the past”, “culture of fear”, “postwar trauma”, “digital memory” (cf. Wahl-Jorgensen 2019; Hoskins 2017; Molden 2016; Herman 1996). Collective emotions and (wartime) trauma lie at the centre of these phenomena as psychosocial categories: emotions are “key to both how trauma is experienced first-hand and to connecting individuals with the social world after. Emotions are, in this sense, part of how trauma is at once personally and socially ‘performed’” (Hutchison 2018: 81). In brief, the focus of my research interest shifted with time from affective politics within commemorative ceremonies³ as socially sanctioned rituals (Connerton 2004: 61-106) to an attempt at understanding the broader spectrum of verbal and non-verbal practices of affective management of the heritage of war in order to meet the sense-making needs of local subjects and uphold the socio-political status quo.

I first became familiar with the fates, predicaments and viewpoints of the people from this microregion in the early 2000s. On 29 October 2003, together with French

¹ From the play *Razgovaranje* (2019) by the art organisation *Četveroruka*, author and director Marina Petković Liker, and dramaturge Maja Sviben.

² This article has been financed by the Croatian Science Foundation (“Narrating Fear: From Old Records to New Orality”, Project No IP-06-2016-2463).

³ The insight gained from studying the new forms of commemorative rituals in Western Slavonia and their inscription onto the map of the national culture of remembering the Homeland War will be presented in a separate paper.

anthropologist Marianne Pradem-Šarinić and a delegation from the Samobor branch of the veterans' organisation HVIDRA, I visited Western Slavonia⁴ to attend the unveiling of a monument dedicated to Homeland War veterans at the Slavonski Trokut Memorial Area (located at the Blatuško Brdo between Novska and Lipik). The memorial area itself is paradigmatic of the Croatian ideological and symbolical transition: in the 1970s, the area became home to one of the most famous partisan monuments in Slavonia, which was then demolished in 1991. During the 2000s, after several stages of construction, one of the more monumental and successful examples of monuments to veterans of the Homeland War was erected in the same area. However, as the grieving parents and relatives were not entirely satisfied, dozens of individualised monuments were then set up along the main road. Furthermore, as of 2017, the central government has also chosen the site as the location to dump their own "ideological waste".⁵

Between 2005 and 2010, I visited Pakrac and Lipik on a number of occasions as part of the project "Remembering the War in Pakrac, Lipik and the Surrounding Area" (cf. Dubljević 2010) conducted by the NGO Documenta. On 28 June 2006, I held a public lecture in Pakrac on the usefulness of oral history as a method for recording local history in post-conflict communities. I tried to convince my future interlocutors of the benefits their personal narratives of the wartime experience could have in reducing interethnic distances, improving social life and furthering the understanding of the specificities of this region in the context of the national culture of remembrance.⁶ When I was assisting the activists of Documenta through all the stages of preparing and recording the interviews, and then through the process of preparing their publication in a book, I found it particularly important to highlight the sheer extent of post-war changes in the beliefs and opinions of people coming from this, once prosperous and multiethnic, Slavonian microregion. While collaborating on the project, I became familiar with the important dates, people, events and military operations from local history. Although I was aware of the memorial culture in the Sisak-Moslavina County, and especially of the desire of the majority of local residents to narratively associate the memory of those who died in World War Two with that of the

⁴ The area in question is a frontier and transit area between Posavina, Moslavina and Western Slavonia, and also an intersection between four different counties. The relative proximity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Slovenia makes this transit area particularly convenient for various forms of legal and illegal trade, seeing that it was always an important part of defensive perimeters and trade routes towards the Ottoman Empire.

⁵ The commemorative plaque honouring the eleven fallen members of the paramilitary Croatian Defence Forces (HOS) was put up on the facade of the municipal building in Jasenovac on 7 November 2016 by their comrades-in-arms from Zagreb, Kutina and the surrounding area. After justified public criticism, the plaque with the CDF coat of arms (which includes the Ustaše salute "For the homeland – ready!") was moved to the Slavonski Trokut Memorial Area in September of 2017.

⁶ In my lecture, I outlined the following goals for oral history projects: a) filling the gaps and shedding light on the "vague" areas in narratives describing historical events; b) taking into account the "view from below" (the perspective of the common people); c) reversing the usual roles (the witness teaches and informs, and the historian learns); d) diverting attention from the facts and chronology of wartime history in order to give more space to peacetime and emancipatory values which aid the establishment of democratic institutions, but also help individuals obtain legal and moral reimbursement for the violations of the law of war they had to suffer through, as well as any other form of (post-war) violation of their human rights.

fallen veterans of the Homeland War, as well as to honour each and every war victim, the situation in Western Slavonia still came as a surprise to me. Driving through the hills, eerily empty in winter, with headstones and ruins lining the side of the road, I felt as if I was being sucked into a time warp, to a time where the war had just ended and urban centres had shrunk.

Theoreticians of affective ethnography show that affective perceptions and emotional experience play a role in ethnographic research which is commensurate to that of participant observation, comparison and other cognitive processes (cf. Škrbić Alempijević et al. 2016: 64–86). With an equal role in the process played by both affective impressions and cognitive observations, sensory experiences guide the researcher as much as their eyes and ears, which in new environments act as a “human ‘feeler’” (Panov 1978: 127). Only with the aid of “flashes of mental and somatic activity rather than causal narratives” (Figlerowicz 2012: 4) can an ethnographer penetrate, if only partially, the realm of *imponderabilia* (Potkonjak 2014: 95) in an interactive situation which is always marked by an ambivalent outcome, especially when it relates to the fluid categories of fear and anxiety, to that which remains unfinished, untold, repressed, ominous or sinister in conversations and other forms of social interaction.

As shown in the study conducted by Jelena Marković (2018b), the impact of the affective atmosphere of fear to the extended Croatian post-war period results from failed attempts to understand past conflicts and accept the present as meaningful and encouraging:

The search for an explanation logically spills over into the present. The present is thus always saturated with past frustrations and delayed conflicts that continue to smoulder until the next confrontation (cf. Bosto et al. 2008: 9). Fear presses members of affective communities into the future as an intense, physical experience in the present. [...] Evil is constantly expected, which ultimately results in an affective atmosphere that is fluid yet in some way still recognizable to all. This atmosphere acts as a vessel in which dominant affective policies as well as personal memories that support or oppose these policies are accumulated. (Marković 2018b: 129)

Conversations with the residents of Lipik and Pakrac have shown that class stratification and ethnic distancing have now been joined by increased emigration, depopulation, economic stagnation and a rise in domestic violence. At the national level, infamous cases such as that of the “Daruvarac” (the symbol of brutal violence against women) and the county head of the Požega-Slavonia County (a local “boss” and domestic abuser) have become emblematic of the crossover between criminal, systematic and “private” violence with clear patriarchal connotations and a political background.⁷ The feeling of marginalisation is further emphasised among residents of Western Slavonia by the suspension of the railway connection to Daruvar (once an administrative and educational centre) and the

⁷ Long-time feminist activist and founder of the NGO Delfin, the Centre for Support and Development of Civil Society in Pakrac, M. B. informed me about the increase in domestic violence of all kinds, not only among (marital) partners.

transfer of political power to the country centre in Požega, as well as by the neglect of their role in the national policy of remembrance of the Homeland War. While the extent of the occupation and devastation which occurred in Lipik and Pakrac in the autumn of 1991 is commensurate to that of Vukovar, the symbolic significance of these two towns cannot even begin to compare to the latter (cf. Žanić 2019; Ljubojević 2020; Vugdelija 2020).

In my ethnographic inquiry into the post-war landscapes and the different modes through which “difficult heritage” is manifested in Western Slavonia I will attempt to tackle two fundamental challenges of affective ethnography: the challenge of partaking in “intensely personal scholarship” (Figlerowicz 2012: 3),⁸ and the researcher’s responsibility to face “every aspect of difficult war heritage” and to give “recognition to such places and the people concerned” (Sablić 2019: 262). Seeing that these two demands are often mutually opposed and contingent, while the post-war “affective atmosphere” is ambivalent and marked by conflicting manifestations, my task can be compared to the method used by the protagonists of Luka Bekavac’s novel *Drenje* (2011): to measure “the disturbances in the bioacoustic system resulting from the Homeland War”.⁹ This is a subtle metaphor for the futility of (quantitative) scientific methods used by researchers to “precisely” measure the ambient impact of “the sound and the fury” of the recent war on the animate and inanimate world in the regions of Slavonia, Baranja¹⁰ and Western Srijem. Rather than being competent experts from the capital, the researchers arriving in *Drenje* are characterised as “jumbled” personalities, prone to despondency, speculation and doubt. On the other hand, the acoustic remnants (echoes and markings) left by the catastrophe of war on bodies and spaces, in the material and immaterial landscape, in what Arjun Appadurai dubs

⁸ The problems faced by the researchers conducting field research as part of the “Narrating Fear” (2017–2021) project, which later affected the way they wrote about the experience of fieldwork, were aptly summarised by Jelena Marković: “fieldwork with people who are traumatised or disenfranchised is marked by numerous obstacles, a lack of trust, fear, and various decisions made by both the researcher and the subjects of the research, all of which hinder the research process, the cognitive process, and the process of writing. In all locations mentioned previously, some interviews were not recorded, mostly because the interlocutors objected to it, but also because there were situations in which I assumed that awareness of the conversation being recorded would jeopardise the cohesion and unrepeatability of the intense communication taking place, which, from a folklorist perspective, which sees the text in context differently than ethnology and cultural anthropology (cf. Lozica 1979: 46), became a methodological and epistemological question, rather than just a question of interpersonal relations” (Marković 2018b: 123).

⁹ When talking about his novels, as well as the immediate experience of life in post-war Slavonia, Luka Bekavac refers to the existing state as a “civilisational cataclysm”, basing the decision to do so on the belief that what is happening is a “literal breakdown which leaves in its wake cultural and economic ruin, as well as radical depopulation: survivors are not only returning to a pre-industrial way of life, but also to what can be described as the life of almost complete solitude”. Luka Bekavac. “Nikada ne polazim od neke potpuno formulirane teme ili teze”. *Moderna vremena*, 2014. Cf. <https://www.mvinfo.hr/clanak/luka-bekavac-nikada-ne-polazim-od-neke-potpuno-formulirane-teme-ili-teze>.

¹⁰ Members of the artist collective *Četveroruka* also made their way to Baranja to work on a research and performance project. The project started out as the recording of conversations with the inhabitants of Darda in the spring of 2017, and ended with several performances, the goal of which was to study “performativity in a blend of the documentary and the theatrical... by looking at what we believe to be one of the elementary problems of the moment we live in: namely, deep divisions, the lack of understanding and fear of the Other, and the aggressive and destructive tendencies we have towards others, but also towards ourselves” (<http://cetveroruka.hr/2017/12/01/udaljenost-fokusiranje-posustajanje>).

the *ethnoscape*, *ideoscape* and *mediascape*, corresponds to the metaphor of “fluid fear”, i.e. anxiety, as described by Zygmunt Bauman (2010). According to Bauman, fear has the ability to spread like water or sound, multiply, seep into everything and touch everyone and everything. Fifteen years after the war, Luka Bekavac no longer sees Slavonian *noise* as a pleasant reminder of the guerrilla-like resistance of the unarmed population, as the sign of unity and self-sacrifice of former rockers and punks; instead, he sees it as a disquieting state marked by a lack of prospects, easy to sense, but difficult to describe:

[...] play someone a tone with a frequency of 15 Hz and you will have a person who is hypnotised; they will, of course, not be able to hear anything so they will believe that there is nothing there, but they will, however, experience an “unexplainable” sadness, fear, trepidation, nervousness, nausea, as you will. The frequency just needs to be calibrated to match the resonant body. (Bekavac 2011: 131)

The image depicting the way in which negative emotions keep resonating within and between bodies affected by a collective catastrophe is a good analogy for how trauma circulates between individual and collective bodies. Psychophysical and moral damages (“in-juries”) and “wounds” are all multiplied in situations marked by violence, as has already been discussed by feminist theorists Elaine Scarry, Sarah Ahmed, Lauren Berlant and Wendy Braun (cf. Hutchison 2016: 63). Scarry emphasises that moral injuries¹¹ can have deeper and more long-lasting consequences because not only is one’s personality changed, but also the concept of community: “injury has a compelling and vivid reality because it resides in the human body, the original site of reality, and more specifically, because of the ‘extremity’ and ‘endurance’ of the alternation” (Scarry 1985: 120). The intergenerational, psychological and social impact of this formative change experienced in the war and because of the war – often expressed through the familiar trope of *deep wounds* and *wounds which cannot heal* – is best expressed by the interlocutors themselves. They are profoundly aware of the effect emotional and moral injuries have on their lives, as well as on the lives of their families and community, and they personally point out the phenomenological difference between knowledge and experience, interpretation and understanding, the scope and the consequences of all those undesirable, “ugly”, “non-cathartic states of feeling” (Ngai 2007) which prevent them from realising the full potential of their lives:

Actually, all of this frustration and this negative aspect of the whole story were burdens borne by my family. They can still feel it. And in this moment, on this day, as well as tomorrow, they will continue to feel the consequences. Because we are no longer the same, we are no longer able to handle certain things, neither psychologically nor physically. [...] I think that in Croatia, but also in the wider region, a million lives were completely changed, lifestyles, ways of living, normal patterns. The whole moral infrastructure of a large number of people was destroyed. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of families

¹¹ An appropriate vernacular diagnosis of moral wounds was related to Marina Petković Liker by an interlocutor from Darda, and the same statement was later repeated in the play *Razgovaranje* (2019): “Let those who want to forget, forget. Let those who want to forgive, forgive. Because I can do neither.”

were ruined. There is not a single person who has not changed. [...] However, this cannot be measured. [...] A psychologist or a defectologist can examine this from a professional point of view to see how much this or that has changed. But they can never understand why. They can only observe. (Drago M. in Dubljević 2010: 174–175)

As trauma scholars have shown, trauma can be seen as emotional pain, inner compulsion, an unbearable condition (cf. Herman 1996) in which victims or witnesses “are struggling to speak of their trauma... to translate what has happened [...] to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech” (Hutchison 2018: 79). Although it seems that in the Croatian public sphere we constantly hear and interpret the repetitive and uniform, Christian and nationalist narrative of (war) trauma, the lack of interdisciplinary research results in a state of ignorance when it comes to the intersections between emotions, society and politics (cf. Blanuša 2017). Political trauma is regularly accompanied by the politicisation of emotions with often centrifugal – but sometimes also centripetal – effects on the community (cf. Demiragić 2018: 64–69). Therefore, only some politics of memory succeed in creating affective communities that are not locally, nationally, ideologically exclusive, because emotions as cultural and social phenomena “can be seen as forces enacted upon by prevailing forms of power: how we feel is part of how we present, constitute, legitimise and enact political views, values, attachments and even policies” (Hutchison 2018: 83). The warning given by Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin in 1997 also applies today:

Political interest and emotions are present even when the author tries to control themselves, when she attempts to suppress her feelings, or even engage in self-censorship. Besides, the choice of theories on which the author tries to construct her paradigm is partially determined by the political circumstances the author lives in, and the ideologies she either accepts or resists. (Rihtman-Auguštin 1997: 87)

A number of folklorists, anthropologists and ethnologists tackled the topic of social remembrance in Croatia in the context of the post-socialist transformation, largely choosing to thematise the material aspect of the “heritage of war” (cf. Frykman 2003; Lončar 2014; Potkonjak and Pletenac 2007), i.e. memorial culture as a whole.¹² A minority of studies were concerned with all three aspects of social alterity (Berger and Luckmann 1992: 176) created by wartime experience as delineated by Elaine Scarry: “(a) embodied persons, (b) the material culture of self-extension of persons, (c) immaterial culture, aspects of national consciousness, political belief, and self-definition” (1985: 114). Among the researchers who were able to successfully grasp these sociocultural features resulting from the war, visible in the actions, judgements and affective responses of people scarred by conflict, we can refer to the works of Stef Jansen (2020), Sanja Lončar (2014), Jelena Marković (2018a, 2018b), and several others stand out. Through their interpretations, they helped assert the roles of vernacular interlocutors on the Croatian periphery as “strong

¹² Cf. The edited volume *Devedesete* (Obad and Bagarić 2020) as well as “Performativity – Politics – Community”, the themed issue of the journal *Slavia Meridionalis* vol. 19, 2019, edited by Ewa Wroblewska-Trochimiuk.

subjects” who “are not fooled, not crushed, not homogenized; indeed, they are creatively appropriating or reinterpreting what is being thrown at them” (Graber 2004: 99).

A MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

Memory in digital age is understood as a dynamic complex of thinking about, making sense of and deciphering the absences and presences (and overlaps) of represented past. It is understood as a practice of unseeing and forgetting of the past in the present. (Hoskins 2018: 20)

The impressions so poignantly summarised by Marina Petković Liker after studying the impact of war trauma on the socioscope of Baranja in 2011 largely correspond to the affective atmosphere I encountered almost a decade later in Western Slavonia:

The past is not going away; instead, it is becoming the almost unalterable present in which we are now living, to which we are intimately connected and which threatens to shape our future. Such a reality is shaped not only by the events which have already taken place, but also by the intimate map of each individual life. Amidst wartime destruction and the resulting pain, amidst the process of having to start a new life with factories shutting down and jobs being lost, amidst support for progress with simultaneous rejection of all those who are deemed unfit due to their age, sex, nationality or other personal traits – usually witnessed by one’s closest neighbour, former friend, so-called “family” – Croatian society was created through conflict and distancing. Distancing from other people and from ourselves. [...] What is needed is to observe, accept, understand, empathise, to try and tell the story – not one but many.¹³

However, a little bit of ethnographic luck is necessary to find just one silenced, typical-yet-also-different story of “distancing from other people and from ourselves” in a productive way. In my case, it happened when I met a “man with a movie camera”, a Džiga Vertov of the digital age whose (semi-professional) camera is almost like his prosthetic limb. To him, “the obsession with collecting material and co-creating (digital) media objects” (Hoskins 2017: 9) gives life meaning after an early retirement. This digital chronicler of public events in Lipik, Pakrac and the surrounding area is a family man with two grown-up daughters; he is not formally a veteran of the Homeland War, but belongs to the affective community of people with strong affective ties based on their immediate experience of war and the defence of the local community’s moral values as espoused by Dr Ivan Šreter in his public appearances during 1991.¹⁴ P. eventually became “a slave to his own hobby”,

¹³ Cf. the description of the project *Udaljavanja* (“Distancing”) by the artist collective *Četveroruka*, <http://cetveroruka.hr/2017/12/01/udaljenost-fokusiranje-posustajanje>.

¹⁴ Doctor Ivan Šreter was the first president of the local branch of the Croatian Democratic Union. In a famous speech given in Pakrac on Statehood Day, 30 August 1991, he called for a Croatian state of equal nationalities, and a Pakrac which would simultaneously be “Croatian and Serbian and Italian and Czech, a

as he describes it, and turned it into a profession to which he devotes all of his energy, time and motivation, which drives him to learn new technical skills. His home-based digital archive and YouTube channel (Lipik Popay TV) is an excellent achievement of a “post-socialist memonaut” (Pogačar 2018) seeing that he is a former mechanic who left the world of industrial wage labour to pursue his unpaid passion as the “digital chronicler” of his city.

Recording, editing and micro-archiving wartime videos on social media, along with the digitalisation of gifted or purchased footage, have helped him deal with the psychological issues which had already emerged during his time as a conscript performing mandatory military service in the Yugoslav People’s Army, only to be made worse by the death of his two children just before the war. The fact that P. generally does not use social media for communication – instead, he prefers to use it to “promote” recordings showcasing the area’s past and present – serves to show that his agency is more than just an individual’s need for resocialisation. He sometimes uses Facebook to connect with people who are interested in exchanging audiovisual “wartime souvenirs”, as well as with those who are looking for someone to help create their music videos. His work on music videos for aspiring musicians is also a source of additional income, but he proudly points out that he refuses to record weddings or other family events because this would not be in line with how he perceives the camera – as a medium to be used for the ethics and aesthetics of testimony. Although he described his personal archival project to me as a form of “self-administered psychotherapy” after previously receiving treatment in a psychiatric institution, it has a deeper meaning. As believed by anthropologists interested in the issues of “human perception, understanding, feeling, and value” (Hoskins 2018) in the digital age, a memory agent embodies an individual’s “urge to make sense of things through objects (as the connective tissue of memory)” as well as “the obsession with collecting... (digital) media objects” (Hoskins 2017: 9). However, the ability to share, exchange, comment and collaboratively create documents using the internet as the “narrative superhighway” (Wilson 2014: 133) did not distract this vernacular subject from creating his own thematic collection and, much like the collectors of “folklore treasurers” of yesteryear, erecting a monument to local man. Establishing a personal archive was P.’s way of resisting the brevity, anonymity and fluid (de) composition of historicity in the digital realm, but also a confirmation of his belief that only authentic video recording could be the truth-bearer about the war.

Along with making video recordings of political, cultural and sporting events, especially commemorative ceremonies for victims of war and different anniversaries, P. also collects professional and amateur wartime footage (related to the local area) and has invested a

home for all those who live here” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZS3OMJx4z3Q>). Dražen Bušić made a documentary about Dr Ivan Šreter titled *Časnik mirotvorac* (“The Peacekeeper Officer”; 2009), and an award named after him is given out every year by the Dr Ivan Šreter Fund and the journal *Jezik* for “the best Croatian word”, i.e. the most successful neologism. The date of his death and the location of his remains are still not known. On 18 August 1991 he was taken captive at the barricades in the village of Kukuņjevac, after which he was transferred to a house in the vicinity of the Serbian POW camp Bučje.

large amount of money, time and resources to seek out some of these “war trophies”¹⁵. While it might seem paradoxical at first, these trophies also help connect people from both sides of the war¹⁶ in a transnational, affective, digital and generational community. The arrival of videotape as a medium is symbolic of the start of the postmodern age, which also includes postmodern wars. In this context, by bringing “an air of unreality to the things they represent” (Baudrillard in Cushman and Meštrović 1996: 79), recordings made on videotape constitute material and symbolic objects of great affective value because the “sensory inscriptions and erasures of war” (Feldman 2015) stored within serve as “connective tissue” which brings together personal and collective memories of the conflict. In other words, despite the ever-present doubt as to the authenticity and constructed nature of reality as depicted on videotape (the thematic focus of the movie *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, 1989), wartime footage can serve as legal evidence, a memory trigger, memorabilia and a symbolic currency the affective value of which can only increase over time.

As explained by Slovenian theorist Martin Pogačar, the vernacular memonauts of the post-socialist era act as “media archeologists and micro-archivists... technically equipped to disinter and re-presence fragments of the past”: they are simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged because of the “abundance of audiovisuals” at their disposal, with the intention to “re-presence the past and to recover this consistency and legitimacy of individual histories” (Pogačar 2018: 35). For example, the memonauts in the veteran community are deeply frustrated by the public politics of memory, which they claim are “distorting the truth about the Homeland War”. As P. mentioned to me many times, the truth is engraved in the body of the veteran/witness just as the war reality is inscribed in photographs or footage from the war, while war narratives books and interpretations offer a distorted, transformed and upgraded (historical) reality in line with the ideological, social and legal changes of the accepted norms and codes of conduct in the community. However, he did not think of the process of editing the footage as a visual narrative. Using the terminology of Reinhart Koselleck, it could be concluded that in the case of veterans’ affective communities the passage of time (with almost 30 years having passed since the start of the war) has only increased the separation between the *Erfahrungsraum* (spaces of experience) and *Erwartungshorizont* (horizons of expectation), and that:

[...] numerous primary experiences... have been repressed or consolidated in the various spaces of consciousness, or that they have been integrated into new contexts of meaning which can no longer be easily connected with the original, primary experience. (Koselleck as cited in Rutar 2017: 208)

¹⁵ As a passionate collector of amateur wartime footage related to the local area, P. was prepared, in his own words, “to do business with the devil himself”, and since the Banja Luka Corps of the Yugoslav Army was active in the region, he often had to venture to Bosnia and Herzegovina in search of footage.

¹⁶ For example, in the documentary *Tri* (“Three”, 2008) by Goran Dević, three soldiers who fought on opposing sides explain that they are the only ones who are able to understand each other; they go on to agree that the most responsible for the war are politicians and that its main features are absurdity and a lack of humanity.

In the context of these persistent attempts by members of the veteran community to “connect with the original, primary experience”, a mnemonic and communicational medium which seemingly meets their social, ethical and aesthetical criteria has emerged. Along with amateur wartime footage, the medium in question are documentaries made as a response to the “crisis of veteran values” and the failed expectations that documents such as the *Declaration on the Homeland War* (2000) or the *Dialogue Document* (2018)¹⁷ (dealing with the use of “symbols of totalitarian ideologies”) would set up a clearly defined “law on historical memory” (cf. Koren 2019: 155) and stop the proliferation of meanings and interpretations attached to wartime events, key figures and military operations. Unlike Croatian feature films with a war theme (cf. Jambrešić Kirin 2011), (semi-)professional movies like the ones made by director and war veteran Pavle Vranjican, e.g. *Amarcord 1* (2001), *Amarcord 2* (2002) and the two-parter *Komsšije* (“Neighbours”, 2003 and 2004), offer content which veterans perceive as intimate and authentic, as the “raw” reality of war, and which simultaneously provide an emotionally intense experience. Whereas many of the director’s other movies use his own wartime videos, the ones mentioned above were created by splicing together randomly found footage recorded by Serbian soldiers, and were the subject of much debate, committed sharing, support and enthusiastic viewing in veterans’ associations. Along with presenting a raw and uncensored first-hand account of wartime reality, these movies aim to portray the “primitive” nature, ruthlessness and blind ideological fervour of the enemy. However, numerous scenes depicting military culture and everyday life during wartime seem to reveal the universal “banality of evil”, as well as nostalgic sentiments attached to local battlefields and specific military operations. The same can be said of semi-professional movies made by Stipe Majić Pipe, a veteran of the battle of Vukovar. As a passionate cineaste, director and producer, he claims that his goal is to show “what the Homeland War really was”. His movies *Srce Vukovara* (“Heart of Vukovar”, 2017) and *Glavu dole ruke na leđa* (“Head Down, Hands Behind Your Back”, 2018), which combines documentary and acted footage, featured a number of never-before-seen scenes from occupied Vukovar and Serbian camps.¹⁸ They are welcomed by veterans’ affective communities as an appropriate mnemonic and artistic medium to work through strong emotions related to war experiences. Meetings with veterans in Lipik convinced me that they perceived P. as a kind of dealer of “spiritual food”.

Rather than a “key interlocutor”, I would refer to my relationship with P., my guide in the field and collaborator in the process of recording, archiving and understanding the predica-

¹⁷ Cf. the so-called *Dialogue Document* published on 28 February 2018 by the Council for Dealing with the Consequences of Undemocratic Regimes, a parliamentary body; full title of the document: *Postulates and Recommendations on Specific Normative Regulation of Symbols, Emblems and Other Insignia of Totalitarian Regimes and Movements*, <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocImages/Vijesti/2018/02%20veljača/28%20veljače/Dokument%20dijaloga.pdf>.

¹⁸ It is important to point out that, along with being shown on Croatian national television, these movies are also screened in different towns across the country. The screenings are organised by veterans’ associations and are usually followed by discussions and socialising. Cf. <https://www.braniteljski-portal.com/stipe-majic-pipe-branitelj-s-trpinjske-ceste-zasto-nema-filmova-o-domovinskom-ratu-prodao-sam-suprugin-auto-za-film-srce-vukovara>.

ments of fieldwork, as a “complex complicity” (Potkonjak 2014: 63–67, 95).¹⁹ For example, the proposal to establish the oral history database in Pakrac or Lipik, which I originally introduced as a participant of the public discussion organised by the NGO Documenta in Pakrac in June of 2006 (the purpose of which was to announce the project of recording personal memories of the war), would not have been possible without this enthusiastic individual.²⁰ However, instead of a public archive of oral history the aim of which was “to enlighten history by ‘reading a voice’” (as Svetlana Alexievich once said), P. established a private digital archive of visual material, and in doing so, gave his own impetus to the “visual turn” in how we remember contemporaneity in the technosphere. The gnoseological trap – inherent in this sort of “turn” – was best summarised by Susan Sontag: “The problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs. This remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding – and remembering. Harrowing photographs... don’t help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand” (2005: 70). This paradoxical need for a narrative mode as a better, deeper and more reflexive understanding of historical reality, one which would be complemented by the cognitive “activity of making sense of the present” (Berlant 2008: 5), was clearly expressed by my otherwise quiet interlocutor, with the added expectation that I should make an active contribution to his archive as well. Despite the reversal of the roles of interlocutor and researcher, P. assumed that his task was to provide me with a high-quality recording, whereas mine was to offer a profound “interpretation” of what I saw and experienced in the field, with the goal of eventually making these short interviews “interesting material” for his YouTube channel (Lipik Popay TV).

As we drove from place to place, my guide, cameraman and documentarian kept asking questions such as “What do you feel in this ‘scary place’?” and “What does it represent to you?”. At memorials to fallen veterans in Prekopakra, Bučje, Jagma, Rakov Potok, Dobrovac, Korita, Trokut, he unknowingly confronted me with the “aura” of authentic places of suffering, but also with the folklorist postulate that every sign and meaning – and this is especially true of meanings attached to historical events – is made “in negotiations between teller and listener” because “telling and listening are fundamentally the same activity and come together in an act of co-creation” (Wilson 2014: 130). My immense fear of the camera (which I never use in fieldwork) just kept growing with every new meeting, and was surely linked to my intimate fears of public speaking, lack of confidence in social

¹⁹ “Complicity is marked by two distinctive features: the idea of establishing a good relationship, but also its opposite, which is referred to [by George E. Marcus] as the ‘evil twin’ of the concept of establishing relations. The concept of ‘complicity’ is indicative of the need to reassess the role of the anthropologist, and the place they hold in relation to the interlocutor” (Potkonjak 2014: 66).

²⁰ This passionate documentarian and collector envisioned his project of archiving local footage as an aid to be used by those who “write history”, i.e. write books and articles about the Homeland War or produce feature films and documentaries centred around the same subject. P. did not hide his disappointment when speaking of movie producers he previously worked with, some of whom would use his footage without giving proper credit or after providing minimal or no reimbursement. However, he was proud of the fact that some of the materials in his possession helped veterans, some of whom were minors during the war, get official veteran status.

situations, distrust of visual media and many other fears and reservations. The fact that I was nonetheless able to express how I felt and what was going through my mind at the site of a former war camp, by an abandoned village or school, in an eerily empty and poorly lit patch of woods, in all these places where lives were ruined and futures cut short, only stems from professional self-control which, with significant stress and effort, always ensured that cognitive was superimposed over affective experience:

Thinking interrupts the flow of consciousness with a new demand for scanning and focus, not for any particular kind of cognitive processing. We are directed to see not an event but an emergent historical environment that can now be sensed atmospherically, collectively. (Berlant 2008: 5)

The widely accessible technosphere and the online archives of cultural memory enable everyone to contest the ghosts of the “restless past”, but also the hegemony of national narration. With the help of social media, chat platforms and ad hoc online groups discussing issues related to the Homeland War (which also function as affective communities), anyone can become involved in activities which do not necessarily have to be “countercultural” or “countermemorial”, but could still manifest themselves as controversies, conflicts or challenges, and even escalate into a “memory war” between different social and ideological subjects. On the other hand, individual members of the veteran communities of the once-opposing parties can find common themes, sentiments, and matching values of warrior masculinity in a digital space celebrating patriarchal and nationalist values. All memorial gestures in the digital space are part of broader cultural processes characterised by “the hyperabundance of information, data, knowledge”, “the intensity and messiness of digital present” (Hoskins 2017: 15), a sense of disorientation in time (which Alex Williams calls chronosickness), and, in the post-socialist context, also “the violence of organized forgetting”, “the absent of political and social vision”, “mis-promised future”, “political infantilisation” and “hysterical anti-communism” (Hoskins 2017: 15, 17, 20, 21). In any case, this intense field experience raised a number of questions which I am going to have to return to. Along with the problem of (a)synchronous experiences of the post-war “historical sensorium”, the new circumstances of creating (digital) reports and fieldwork material in partnership with the interlocutor, point to the issue of the researcher’s status as the one “who is using and being used” (Agar in Potkonjak 2014: 64). The researcher is also embedded in the cluster of contemporary fears pertaining to public exposure and control – especially the fear of the possibility that communication could continue with the same intensity for “days, weeks, months, even years in the online space” (Wilson 2014: 135).²¹ The democratic potential of

²¹ My interlocutor was clearly disappointed to hear that I did not have a Facebook profile. However, thanks to traces left behind in the digital sphere, I was able to get daily updates on the content P. was posting on his YouTube channel. The idea that public influence or public visibility makes a fundamental difference between the interlocutor and the “expert” (who is the one shaping public opinion) is no longer valid, which is also supported by the fact that the number of viewers on his YouTube channel is greater than the number of colleagues who follow my work on the Croatian academic portal Hrčak. As in similar situations previously encountered in the field, relations of kinship proved more important for successfully entering the local community than “digital brotherhood”. I passed the test of trust surprisingly easy – the mention of one of my

the digital sphere has created inconceivable opportunities for (co-)creating future studies in which the established asymmetry of power, authority and responsibility could be redistributed between “participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands” (Jenkins in Wilson 2014: 130).

LESSONS ON HUMANITY

This is precisely why we will continue to record and publish these testimonies; however, they should then be included in our textbooks, children should learn about them and this should resonate beyond the borders of Croatia. If Americans had stories like these, they would have already made an Oscar-winning movie about it.

Jadranka Pavić, PhD, associate contributor to the book *Pouke o čovječnosti*²²

In addition to the described ways of affective management of war heritage within Croatian memorial culture, there are uncertain attempts from above to turn positive testimonial narratives into “the battle of master narrative vs. the counter-narratives of war” (Demiragić 2018: 69–75; also Jambrešić Kirin 2005) on the ever-present digital platforms.²³ The testimonial-film project *The Lessons of Humanity* (2017, 2019), which brought together psychiatrists, politicians, filmmakers and local memory agents, is one such example of a (counter-)narrative memory of war,²⁴ distinct because of its pacifist and humanist ethical position. The project is reflective of the desire to replace anxiety associated with the disturbing confrontation with the wartime past, often presented as the battle of monolithic *truth-as-loyalty* to the Homeland War against the multifaceted *untruth/disloyalty*, with

relatives triggered a wave of emotional responses and called up numerous positive wartime memories in the veterans we met in the café of the Veterans' Home in Lipik. A veteran expressed his admiration for my relative as one of the rare few military commanders who remained a “regular, kind man” and hardworking farmer even after the experience of war.

²² Cf. Stefani Čenan. “Pouke o čovječnosti. Promocija knjige o najhumanijoj akciji Domovinskog rata”. 17 March 2017. <http://pakrackilist.hr/pouke-čovječnosti-promocija-knjige-najhumanijoj-akciji-domovinskog-rata/>.

²³ One of the first digital databases of personal war memories was launched by the NGO Documenta (<http://www.osobnasjecanja.hr/>). There is also a memorial database dedicated to citizens who went missing during the war (<https://nestali.gov.hr/>), which was later followed up with a digital and public campaign conducted by the daily newspaper *24sata* titled “Missing in the Homeland War” (2016–2019). Trendy “virtual cemeteries” are also set up as interactive networks of life stories, memories and recollections of deceased relatives, fallen veterans in particular, as spaces “where the living can express their grief and mourning and create content in memory of their dead” (Plenković and Varga 2017), i.e., where they can publish “their emotions, stories, memories and photos”. Also see the website: <https://www.nikadzaboravljeni.com.hr/>.

²⁴ As Ajla Demiragić points out: “in parallel with the (re-)production of established knowledge about war and the master narrative as the legitimising ideological discourse of war, alternative discourses of war are also produced, the so-called counter-narratives of the master narrative that have the potential to destabilise the normative order and to open space for political action and resistance” (2018: 70).

an optimistic view of the future. However, the ability to imagine a multiethnic community driven by humanist values and multiculturalism has been an integral part of the region's history – a region with almost twenty ethnic minorities – since the late 19th century.

While established commemorative rituals, the erection of monuments, educational visits to places of suffering, digital re-presentation of the “heritage of war” – all based on the narration of binary oppositions such as “winners and losers, perpetrators and victims, heroes and martyrs” (Rutar 2017: 208) – are obviously present in this part of Croatia, one can also find counter-narratives, i.e. “positive stories of help and rescue” which most resemble the genre of parable. As Nicolas Moll (2019) recently demonstrated on examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina, these are well-thought-out efforts – usually by agents from civil society, artists and researchers working in the humanities – to make visible the positive acts of “humane heroism” or “another war-related figure: that of the rescuer who helped people ‘from the other side’”. The goal of such initiatives is to create an emotional regime²⁵ in order “to provide a more differentiated view of the realities of the war” and new “historical moral exemplars” (Moll 2019: 447, 473, 474).

Social psychologists have pointed out that these social turns “in cultivating compassion and creating community” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019: 16) are usually accompanied, or preceded, by well-considered affective politics. A focus on positive emotions in a particular social environment can help create an atmosphere of optimism and security, encourage economic and other activity, and inspire people to make more rational and autonomous decisions. In other words, a positive affective atmosphere can have positive “effects on judgment and decision-making on the one hand, and effects on information processing or styles of thinking on the other” (Clore and Palmer 2009). One of the possible definitions of emotions also highlights the relationship between the affective, ethical, cognitive and narrative logic of distinguishing between different emotions: “*Emotion is a multi-system registration of the goodness or badness and importance of something.* The various specific emotion types, then, are representations of the particular ways in which something can be good or bad” (ibid.). In other words, “the narratives of heroic helpers” revalorise humanist role models as a method of healing and de-traumatisation or de-pathologisation of the community through a narrative event focused on the “miracle” of regular human kindness and justice, where the witness/teller is “treated with respect and supported for the bravery it takes to come forward”, and members of the community are encouraged to use “skills, abilities, values, commitments, beliefs and competencies that will assist them to change their relationship with the problems influencing their lives”.²⁶

²⁵ Based on Foucault's notion of technologies of the self, Arlie Hochschild and William Reddy (2001) proposed the theoretical concept of emotional regime in order to describe the emotional “management of the self” in political and economic terms. They believe that late capitalism constructs an idealised productive subject which requires a certain kind of emotion management and an organisational regime of emotional conduct.

²⁶ In the 1980s, therapists Michael White and David Epston developed a new, non-pathologising approach to narrative therapy. The three constituent elements of this therapy are: respect, non-blaming and improving the tools of self-management. It assumes people as having many skills, abilities, values,

Literary theorist Northrop Frye stated that this is an example of a typical (epic) hero whose “power to action” is roughly the same as ours; this (anti-)hero is not “superior in degree to other man” but to his natural environment (1957: 33). In other words, through his actions he resists the “upturned” order of wartime reality in which, as Hobbes said in *Leviathan*, the “life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”, and where nationalism, xenophobia, violence and plunder have risen to the status of “normal” values. As folklorists already know, all narration pertaining to one’s own life is related to the selection of motives and rhetorical techniques in which we see markings of genres like legends, parables or testimonies. “The narrative of the heroic helper” most closely resembles a parable, and media intermediaries, rather than the narrator, influence the selection of what will be recounted. In doing so, they “select only certain information while other events become neglected”, thereby reducing complex and ambivalent wartime situations and protagonists to black-and-white characters.²⁷ Still, if trauma is a “blow we do not understand but have to take in... the pure impact of sheer happening” (Felman 2002: 179), then educational stories about good people in dark times represent an attempt to restore agency within the framework of the humanist standards of kindness and justice, “even though it is up to us [spectators] to make our own choice among the different values offered by the story” (Kearney 2009: 154). Speaking from a broader social perspective, this is the type of testimonial genre which has been endorsed by certain politicians and national leaders²⁸ in the 21st century in order to encourage support for the ideals of humanity, solidarity and concern for others, which are deemed to be disappearing in neoliberal societies. The inspiration comes from the Israeli model of “Righteous Among the Nations”:

The growing public attention given to rescuers, and increased promotion of their memory, is illustrated by the fact that in the last 25 years many European states have officially acknowledged and institutionalized their tribute to the ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ from their own countries. This is based on the tribute given by the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Centre Yad Vashem to the non-Jews who saved Jews from Nazi extermination during the Second World War. (Moll 2019: 448)

commitments, beliefs and competencies that will help them to change their relationship with the problems influencing their lives. Cf. <https://narrativetherapycentre.com/about/>.

²⁷ Whether it takes place in oral, written or digital communication, storytelling plays a key role in the transmission of historical memory, in shaping desirable social forms and in establishing ethical norms of the community. Finally, it is crucial for the human ability to distinguish good from evil, love from hate. Thanks to “storytelling’s often contradictory nature, its multiplicities, and its temporary status... as a welcome mess”, we are encouraged and motivated to “navigate a rapidly changing world full of uncertainties” (Wilson 2014: 125). Indeed, “the idea of storytelling as a mess” (ibid.), as well as the idea of storytelling as a way of introducing the cosmic order into fateful and natural chaos, only affirms the key role of storytelling in the production of community continuity and the (biographical) integrity of the individual, in linking past events “with the present interpretation of these events in light of our enduring existential story” (Kearney 2009: 53).

²⁸ “The European Parliament, for example, in 2012 supported the creation of a ‘European Day of Remembrance for the Righteous’ which refers to ‘those who helped the Jews during the Holocaust’ as well as to ‘people who saved lives during all genocides and mass murders (such as the Armenian, Bosnian, Cambodian and Rwandan ones) and the other crimes against humanity perpetrated in the 20th and 21st centuries” (Moll 2019: 448). Cf. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0205+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

The Slavonian example of media re-semanticisation of wartime heritage and its affective “translation” into a positive story with emancipatory meaning is represented in the book of testimonies *Pouke o čovječnosti* (“Lessons on Humanity”, Đorđević 2017)²⁹, as well as the documentary film of the same name directed by Branko Ištvančić (2019).³⁰ The book and documentary recount the story of how around 300 psychiatric and other patients and doctors were evacuated from the Pakrac Hospital on 29 September 1991. Using popular discourse and the discourse of public healthcare, the operation is presented as “one of the most honourable and humane events of the Homeland War, and also one of the purest examples of wartime medical ethics in the world.”³¹ For over twenty-five years, the evacuation of the patients has been perceived in the local community as “a simple operation without much philosophising”,³² as an act of “everyday humanity” (Tomo Medved in Đorđević 2017: 14), and was only humbly commemorated by its participants. The original planner of the action, Đorđe Gunjević, who was an assistant to the Government Commissioner for Healthcare and Welfare in Pakrac at the time, later also published a collection of memoirs/diaries (Gunjević 2010; also cf. Dubljević 2010: 70–72), but these went largely unnoticed by the public. At the *Pouke o čovječnosti* (Đorđević 2017) book launch held in Pakrac on 16 March 2017, he briefly described the operation as follows:

The operation was successful. We were willing, we had the expertise and so on. [...]. When I got to the hospital on that unfortunate morning of 28 March 1991, all hell broke loose. We had enough dry rations to last us two or three days. We could no longer use the municipal water system so we had to get water from the well. We realised that there was no way out so I said I was leaving and that I would do what I could. Doctor Vidović escorted me out of the hospital with tears in his eyes. Believe me, I teared up as well. After that, I went to Kutina and contacted the secretary of Minister Hebrang. She told

²⁹ The book was prepared by Dr Veljko Đorđević, a well-known psychiatrist, at the initiative of Dr Marijana Braš, who attended the commemoration in Pakrac in 2016 as a representative of the Croatian president, and with the assistance of a journalist and contributor to the weekly newspaper *Glas Koncila* (Vlado Čutura and Dr Jadranka Pavić), and Pakrac war veteran and professor Josip Huška Gonzo. The co-editors of the publication conducted around twenty interviews with people who participated in the operation – medical staff, bus drivers and soldiers who evacuated the patients and guarded the convoy. The book was published by the City of Pakrac, the Zagreb Institute for Health Culture and the Medicinska naklada publishing house from Zagreb. A book launch was held on 16 March 2017 in the Pakrac High School. Cf. <https://pakrackilist.hr/pouke-covjecnosti-promocija-knjige-najhumanijoj-akciji-domovinskog-rata/>.

³⁰ The director of the documentary *Pouke o čovječnosti* (2019), B. Ištvančić, used the book as the basis and gave Dr Đorđević the role of the narrator. The film was supported by the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs, the City of Zagreb, the City of Pakrac and the Adris Foundation. In a private conversation, the author told me that he had to face resistance from the local community – namely, the journalist from *Glas Koncila* and the co-editor of the publication, who wanted to change the script and influence the production of the documentary. The documentary was awarded the Bronze Medal at the 38th International Grand Prix for Author's Documentary of the Paris-based International Radio and Television Union (URTI), and was also shortlisted at the “Docs for Sale” competition at the 32nd International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam (IDFA) in 2019.

³¹ The quote comes from the prologue to *Pouke o čovječnosti* written by Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, President of the Republic of Croatia at the time (Đorđević 2017: 11).

³² This description was given by Marko Martinelli, a veteran from Pakrac who participated in the operation, at the book launch in Pakrac on 16 March 2017. Cf. <https://pakrackilist.hr/pouke-covjecnosti-promocija-knjige-najhumanijoj-akciji-domovinskog-rata/>.

me that he could not receive me before 4 o'clock the next day, but I was persistent and was able to get him to receive me the same day at 6 o'clock in the afternoon. I presented my plan and then we arranged the details. He gave me his approval, after which I went to Čazmatrans, where I was able to procure six buses. We left for Pakrac. We were successful, it was a great pleasure, believe me! Thank you for inviting me here tonight, said Đorđe Gunjević, the original planner of this humanitarian operation...³³

Still, the questions remains – how did one of the two most controversial events from local wartime history, a “mixture of trauma and taboo” burdened with “hegemonic silence” and “affectively charged interpretational contestation” (Blanuša 2017: 171), rise to become “useful past” (Koren 2011) and a model example of medical ethics? How did it suddenly become a “symbol, milestone, starting point and guideline for teaching future generations about medical ethics”, and how were its protagonists assigned the moral qualities of “heroes of humanity, ambassadors of good” for “not forgetting their psychiatric patients even during the hardest times of war and suffering” (Đorđević 2017: 17), i.e. staying true to professional ethics and peacetime ethical principles?³⁴ One of the pieces of information which is regularly repeated is that the majority of those evacuated and transferred to other hospitals were Serbs; however, in such cases, what is usually left out is the fact that there were negotiations under way at the highest level to have the Serb rebels take in “their” share of the patients or to simply “sacrifice” the hospital.³⁵ The excellent organisation and bravery of everyone involved is celebrated, but nobody wants to bring up the fate of Đorđe Gunjević, the doctor behind the operation, who ended up in the Pakračka Poljana war camp immediately after the evacuation, while his family members experienced different

³³ I met with Đorđe Gunjević in Lipik on 30 November 2017. In our conversation, he complained that despite having received the Order of the Croatian Morning Star for outstanding courage and exceptional achievements in humanitarian activity in 2010, he was still required to pay one hundred thousand kuna in court costs after losing his court case and the rights to damages for injuries and pain experienced during his internment in the Pakračka Poljana war camp, where he was held captive from 11 October to 16 October 1991. This turn of events filled him with “feelings of injustice, pain and humiliation”. He also expressed his regret that others had recently been trying to “take symbolic and material credit” for the successful evacuation of the patients.

³⁴ In the context of the recent struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic, the moral dilemma inherent in making triage-related decisions is compared to the most difficult wartime situations. An Italian doctor from Bergamo recently said in an interview given to the *Corriere della Sera*: “In a hospital in Bergamo, we recently found ourselves in the situation where we had to choose who to save... Decisions are made based on the patient’s age, their overall condition and their chances of survival... I will not waste words on people who consider us heroes today, but were more than prepared to insult or report us just one day earlier. Both things will soon return... And these days, we are not heroes. This is our job. At the end of the day, we are just trying to be helpful to everyone. Now you try to do the same.” Cf. <https://hrvatska-danas.com/2020/03/10/talijanski-lijecnik-opisuje-strasnu-dramu-oko-korona-virusa-sutnja-je-neodgovorna-razumijem-potrebu-da-se-ne-stvara-panika-ali/>.

³⁵ In his diary, Đorđe Gunjević writes about how, after initially allowing the operation to go ahead in the morning of 29 September 1991, Minister Hebrang phoned him around 4 o'clock in the afternoon to inform him that the operation was being called off. However, as the telephone connection with Zagreb could not be established, he went ahead with the operation because all the necessary preparations had already been successfully carried out. On the issue of his arrest and later internment at the camp in Pakračka Poljana, he says: “It is obvious that some staff members were trying to get rid of me in any way possible – all with the goal of taking over my position once we left Pakrac. I came to this conclusion after hearing on a number of occasions, personally or from others, that people were asking ‘why do we need this Serb anyway’” (ibid.: 82).

forms of harassment, much like other “undesirable” citizens. Another issue which is usually omitted is the problem of organising the work of medical staff in wartime conditions, as well as of those who had to flee as refugees, which arose because the tasks involved were assigned to people unfamiliar with the local circumstances. We could say that it is precisely knowledge of all the “problematic traces” of this local war story, along with the “chauvinistic empathy for one’s own ilk” (Lanzoni 2018: 279), that became the obstacle for carrying out the detabooisation of the narrative about saving the life of one’s fellow man (designated as the Enemy in public and phantasmatic discourse). The involvement of numerous local (and international) civil initiatives, political negotiations, dialogue between representatives of different confessions,³⁶ and – finally – the expert affirmation of local wartime heritage were all required for much desired empathy to eventually shine through “at moments when habitual judgments and usual opinions give way and another’s experiences takes the stage” (ibid.: 280).

Still, what we are witnessing here could hardly be described as a vernacular “demotic turn”³⁷ in confessional culture,³⁸ or personalised storytelling; instead, it shows the markings of a politically designed campaign with the potential to effect social change. In fact, it is a retrospective dive into the same pool of traumatic wartime experiences out of which the phenomenon of “organised innocence” also emerged – “the habit of constructing nations as innocent and truthful... strictly denying nationalist and racist fantasies” (Jalušič 2004: 56), but now with the desire to use the state of “resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony” (Molden 2016) for the global promotion of a “great” local war story. The narrative promotion of the soldiers’ humanity and the doctors’ and nurses’ professional ethics, all of whom risked their lives to save patients of a different nationality, is not the result of efforts at the national level to introduce “a different, critical discourse on the topics of war and human suffering” (Vitaljić 2013: 183) within “an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action” (Alexander 2004: 1). Statements indicative of this interpretation from the book and documentary confirm how authentic gestures of individual humanity eventually became – with professional assistance, i.e. through the application of a kind of “therapeutic storytelling” and “appropriative empathy” – the proof of the moral superiority of the national collective which rightfully emerged victorious (cf. Čolović 2008). In this process, there was a lack of awareness of the “performative construction of mediated authenticity” within the “affective politics of memory in the late

³⁶ In addition to Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Lipik and Pakrac are also home Evangelicals (Lutherans; in Brekinska), Baptists (in Pakrac) and Adventists (in Lipik). The economically and socially significant Jewish community was almost completely destroyed during World War Two.

³⁷ Graeme Turner (2012) assumes that optimistic critiques of contemporary transformations in media culture have been too quick to assume that increased participation in media production (*demos*, people) will correlate with increased power and control (*kratos*, rule, strength, power).

³⁸ Meryl Aldridge indicates that confessional culture is associated with a “particularly controversial aspect of tabloidisation, condemned by many within the media industry as trivial or even degrading”. However, the notion also refers to the “positive audience response”, “public explorations of the subjective”, as well as “an important flexing of the boundary between the public/rational/masculine and the private/affective/female domains” (2001: 91).

capitalism” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019: 66), where emotional, compelling personal stories are used to strengthen ties among community members through shared compassion.

The fact that defensive mechanisms which reflect political taboos or “collective strategies to deal with threatening traces from the past” are still very present in the political unconsciousness of the vernacular community is also confirmed by another example of individual responsibility and ethical behaviour in wartime Pakrac. The example in question is that of Ivan Hiti, a professor and retired army commander from Varaždin, who, in February of 1992, refused to burn the contents of the library located in the Orthodox rectory in Pakrac, believing that “only the greatest barbarians like Hitler or now ISIS burn books”,³⁹ and without knowledge of the fact that he had in fact saved one of the most valuable collections of Serbian Orthodox liturgical literature from destruction. A quarter of a century had to pass for his refusal to act on a superior’s order to turn from “treason” into a “humane act of saving cultural treasure”, and for the protagonist of this story to receive two important state decorations, but no public valorisation and general approval. It would seem that the reason behind the overall silence surrounding Ivan Hiti’s noble gesture is the citizens’ “complicity in the moral fall of [the] leaders”, which results in “the decision to be silent and obedient” (Blanuša 2017: 194). On the other hand, it is also the familiar ideological indoctrination from above,⁴⁰ which reflects in the public sphere “the taboo signifiers of national identifications in Croatia... [the] Homeland War, the Nation, [the] Enemy” (ibid.), i.e. “some sort of socio-symbolical order, represented by its authorities, ancestral heroes, saints and martyrs” (Blanuša 2017: 177). From a narratological standpoint, the determining factor for “other people’s stories” to gain “validity as evidence” (Shuman 2005: 18) is not their content but the affective openness and willingness of the recipients, the broader community, to re-appropriate them as expressions of common experience.

And that would mean that “these people have left their initial state of victimhood, and have become agents and advocates of positive change in society” (Moll 2019: 461). Amy Shuman believes that “the exposure of previously unheard voices can stand as a corrective to dominant [in this case nationalist] discourses” (2005: 11) and that an empathic understanding of the compelling personal story is “a sufficient and desirable response” (2005: 18). Without ethically responsible pedagogical and political work committed to the affirmation of humanist values, which are most often lacking in the commemora-

³⁹ Director Branko Lazić from Banja Luka made a documentary film about the efforts of Ivan Hiti titled *Biti ili ne biti – Ivan Hiti* (“To Be or Not to Be – Ivan Hiti”; 2015). During the war, instead of destroying the library, Hiti arranged for the books to be transported from Pakrac to the National and University Library in Zagreb. For failing to perform his duty, he was discharged from the army, was no longer able to find employment in public service, and was called out in the media and his hometown as a traitor. In 2013, he was decorated for his brave and humane act of saving cultural treasures (he was awarded the Order of Stjepan Radić by President Ivo Josipović and the Order of the Holy Emperor Constantine by Patriarch Irinej in Belgrade).

⁴⁰ In my conversations with representatives of the Serbian minority, I heard repeated the statement which was originally made by the Deputy Mayor of Pakrac, Goran Labus, in September of 2016: “As a small community, we are hostages of high-level politics. I can guarantee that there have been no international tensions, intolerance or, God forbid, physical assaults in Pakrac for a long time. Cf. <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/i-britanski-princ-charles-obnavlja-vladikin-dvor-1112262>.”

tive revival of the heritage of war, it is not possible to achieve a democratic cultivation of historical consciousness and democratic forms of political life.

CONCLUSION: FROM “DIFFICULT” WAR HERITAGE TO LESSONS ON HUMANITY

Using the concepts of affective community (Ahmed 2016; Hutchinson 2016) and affective management of memorial heritage of war (Logan and Reeves 2009; Gegner and Ziino 2012; Lončar 2014; Stubić 2019), the analysis has shown that social subjects in Western Slavonia – a microlocation with many places of memory and a dense accumulation of historical trauma – are constructed as resisting and/or conforming to the dominant hegemonic policy of remembering the Homeland War as the “cornerstone of reasoning” (Blanuša 2017). National narratives about the wartime past as a mythical structure, and the culture of memory as its performative framework, can be described as exclusive rather than inclusive because their goal is to uphold a “certain group as the legitimate heir – and erase reminders of a diverse pre- and subnational past” (Bucur and Wingfield 2001: 3), that is, it is the cause of more or less covert forms of discrimination and marginalisation of members of the minority population.

The analysed examples of grassroots (re-)evaluation of the wartime past in digital memory culture, as well as the academic, political and artistic promotion of the narrative of “humanitarian heroism” in the global context, involved: a) a private digital archive containing audiovisual footage from the war and the socialist period; b) a book and a documentary film focusing on the “heroes of humanity” (*Lessons on Humanity*, 2017, 2019). Based on these examples, I identified various strategies of cultural, pedagogical and ideological representation, affective re-appropriation and performative re-animation of local wartime legacy in the social and digital environments. These diverse strategies appear in response to the fears that the feeling of social connection to war events and veterans as symbols of national unity and pride has been ebbing away.

One of the conclusions of the research, which also included my civil engagement in the implementation of the oral history project “Remembering the War in Pakrac, Lipik and Surrounding Places” (cf. Dubljević 2010), is that there is a noticeable shift on the Croatian (semi-)periphery from a ceremonial commemorative culture to a digital culture of memory of war which implies interconnectivity, personal involvement and vernacular engagement in the processing and documenting the heritage of war. The second conclusion is that, unlike groups defined by identity markers, affective communities are more flexible, largely transcending local, ethnic, and generational boundaries, but they, more often than not, generate radical forms of ideological communities. The vernacular practice of constructing and sharing negative emotions among the members of these communities is a consequence of confessional culture which the everyday (ideological) struggles

over the meanings of wartime events and tragedies combine with the controversial aspect of tabloidisation. The abundance of visual traces and audiovisual objects from the war in digital circulation guarantees affective bonding, but also maintains the social and cultural trauma as “at once personally and socially performed” (Hutchison 2016). The third observation recognises the democratic impulses of distinguished projects which seek to replace the affective paradigm of maintaining community cohesion with the ethical paradigm, ethical agency.

Interactions with an idiosyncratic “digital bricoleur” and the founder of the digital archive of local and war history (with his YouTube channel, Lipik Popaj TV), convinced me that the increasingly accessible digital media have opened up the (techno)space for local memory agents to transcend the prevailing sense of a-historicity or counter-historicity in the name of “co-historicity” which requires creative “individual interventions into the historical sensorium” (Hoskins 2017). The creative use of digital media, and in particular the digitalisation, re-combination and storage of audiovisual records existing on earlier memory units, is a confirmation of new media literacy and a proof of personal attempts at the semiotic management of the “forever restless and risky past” (Hoskins 2017). Moreover, the “digital bricoleur” manifests his vernacular resistance to both conformist nostalgia and the lack of a political vision of sustainable development in the local community. The conclusion of the first part is that even though the Croatian “social framework of memory” (Halbwachs 2012) provides affective communities with different models for processing the trauma of war into cultural heritage, only individuals, such as the “Slavonian Džiga Vertov”, can and do remember, and only they can become “memory agents” and the subjects of “mnemonic resistance” (Molden 2016) with an important role in disputes over the meaning of history.

In the last section I provided two recent examples of the de-tabooisation of wartime events and figures, i.e. public narratives in which the paradigms of victimhood and triumph are replaced with a narrative on “righteous individuals” and “heroes of humanity” from the wartime period. I also drew attention to the cultural and political circumstances which enabled the global paradigm of remembering wars to turn into a paradigm where examples of “humane heroism” or “another war-related figure: that of the rescuer who helped people ‘from the other side’” are given a central role. The analysis of the testimonial volume (Đorđević 2017) and the film *Lessons on Humanity* directed by Branko Ištvančić (2019) – based on the “powerful emotional resonance of stories” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019: 66), new versions of parable and legend as narrative genres – showed the ethical shortcomings and inconsistencies of the noble attempt to replace politically manipulative and socially unproductive traumatic emotions with a new confidence in humanist values and the spiritual power to do good. Both projects drew public attention to Pakrac’s medics who, under the guidance of ethical individuals, opposed hatred, chauvinism and aggression at the very beginning of the war.⁴¹ Thanks to “storytelling’s often contradictory nature, its

⁴¹ Both projects were supported by national institutions, medics, scholars and politicians confirming that anonymous protagonists can become globally relevant “historical moral exemplars” with a little help from

multiplicities” (Wilson 2014), this narrative memory project was able to point to a number of ethical challenges and ambivalent war situations. However, it fell into the trap of the ethical appropriation of “moral superiority” of the nation promoting empathy as the affective gesture strong enough to restore dignity to wartime victims and survivors of war violence.

My most recent interviews with people from Western Slavonia were conducted at the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The context raised questions about comparisons between the current situation and the wartime memories of life in isolation, in places cut off from communication networks, under siege at all times of day and night, exposed to non-selective bombardment, and in constant fear for one’s own life and the lives of one’s family members. However, contrary to the war-like imaginary propagated by the media, characterised by the rhetoric of “fighting the invisible enemy”, my interlocutors, retired school teachers, pointed out that wartime was easier to understand, usually due to family experiences of previous wars. The situation being experienced now cannot be related to narrative memories of similar diseases (the Spanish flu, typhoid, smallpox, cholera) or other dangers stored in the collective memory. However, what they find reassuring and what protects them from the media-induced paranoid fear is the universal healthcare system in which they have absolute trust, and with which every senior resident of this region is connected either directly or indirectly, having spent their entire working life contributing to the construction and purchase of equipment for “their” healthcare centres and medical facilities. It is up to future studies to determine how the lived and communicated experience of this social trauma will fill the present historical moment with new narrative meanings and powerful emotional resonance.

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STRAH, ČOVJEČNOST I UPRAVLJANJE BAŠTINOM RATA: DVIJE NARACIJE IZ ZAPADNE SLAVONIJE

Uz pomoć pojmova afektivne zajednice (Ahmed 2015; Hutchison 2016) i afektivnog upravljanja baštinom rata (Logan i Reeves 2009; Gegner i Ziino 2012; Lončar 2014; Stublić 2019), rad propituje kako se na prostoru zapadne Slavonije – mikrolokaciji s mnoštvom mjesta sjećanja i gustom sedimentacijom povijesnih trauma u njima – oblikuju društveni subjekti u otporu i/ili suglasju s dominantom hegemonijskom politikom pamćenja Domovinskog rata kao "okosnicom svakog prosuđivanja" (Blanuša 2017) vrednota u hrvatskom društvu. Analizirani primjeri uključuju aktivnosti lokalnog kreatora

kulturnog sjećanja (engl. *memory agent*) i utemeljitelja digitalnog arhiva lokalne povijesti te recepciju knjige svjedočenja i dokumentarni film o humanosti pakračkih medicinara u ratu (*Pouke o čovječnosti*, 2017 i 2019). Uz pomoć ovih primjera ukazala sam na različite strategije kulturalne, pedagoške i ideološke re-representacije te re-animacije lokalne baštine rata u socijalnom i digitalnom okružju kao različite odgovore na bojazan da slabi osjećaj društvene povezanosti s ratnim događajima i braniteljima kao simbolima nacionalnog jedinstva i ponosa. Međutim, pokazalo se da je i na hrvatskoj (polu)periferiji zamjetan pomak od ceremonijalne komemorativne kulture prema digitalnoj kulturi sjećanja na rat koju njeguju afektivne zajednice koje nadilaze lokalne, etničke i generacijske granice. Drugi pomak je semantički – težnja da se viktimološke i trijumfalističke ratne naracije zamijene onima o “humanitarnom herojstvu” i pozitivnim ratnim pričama o čovječnosti, o pomaganju i spašavanju pripadnika “neprijateljske strane”. Zaključak analize glasi da premda hrvatski “društveni okvir pamćenja” (Halbwachs 2013) nudi različite modele za preradu straha, boli, nasilja i traume rata u “kulturnu baštinu”, samo se pojedinci sjećaju i osjećaju, a vrlo mali broj njih postaju kreatori kulturnog sjećanja i subjekti “mnemoničkog otpora” (Molden 2016) sa značajnijom ulogom u borbama oko značenja prošlosti.

Ključne riječi: tjeskoba i strah, afektivna zajednica, baština rata, digitalno sjećanje, narativno sjećanje, priče o humanitarnom herojstvu