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MOTHERLAND IS FEMALE GENDER¹

The article concentrates on some of the cultural mechanisms that construct female identity and bring it into representation. It focuses on the example of Croatian political propaganda between 1990 and 2000 and the autobiographic discourse about the war in Croatia, 1991-1995.

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Far back to the time when Christianity elevated love, mercy and forgiveness above other human virtues, a woman always waited at home for her man who had gone off to war. In her as such — the one who waits — — Jean Bethke Elshtain recognised the symbolics of what the man was not — nor wanted to be — in the society that he dominated. In other words, she recognised woman as the Other to the man, and she was, at the same time, also his justification: it was because of her and the qualities she bore that he went to war (Elshtain 1982:32-35).² While he did battle in the exposed positions of hitherto unknown landscapes and crouched in cold, damp trenches, he dreamt of the warmth of home, the warmth which was maintained by a woman (whether his wife, fiancée, mother or sister) even in his absence. That is why he had to be brave and to persist in every way possible to prevent the enemy in his intentions. And the enemy, as told in the history of war propaganda, stops at nothing: if he steps onto the threshold of a captured house, he will rape the woman and drag off the children to become his slaves.

¹ Even when it is not the *Motherland* but the *Fatherland*, it is usually preceded by the definite article for feminine rather than masculine gender: *la patrie*.

² "Being the purveyors of war trophies and spectators to male bravery is a task that drew women closer to the circle of actual combat in many pre-state societies", stated Elshtain and concluded that such a woman was a reflection of the man, his inspiration and ardent supporter until the emergence of Christianity, completely integrated into the way of life of the warrior band. Elshtain sees the heroines of Greek tragedy in this light too, and she claims that even Hekuba did not question the phenomenon of war but only mourned its consequences (Elshtain 1987:181; 1982:32).

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that few of the nations, including France, Britain, Germany and Ireland permitted a woman (Marianne, Britannia, Germania and Erin) to become their allegory, most notably at the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century (when 16th century iconography *à la* antiquity was brought into life). Still, Marianne also showed that the people were not inclined to abstractions. Entering history at the end of the French Revolution, at first merely as a coded name of the movement itself, she was soon "secularised" with the help of the visual arts which, right up until 1969, gave her form in depictions of anonymous, ordinary young women, in that way elevating her to an embodiment of political emancipation. In 1969, the sculptor Asan depicted Marianne in the likeness of Brigitte Bardot. The bust was placed in the town hall of the township of Thiron-Gardais, and despite the objections voiced in various quarters, Brigitte Bardot became the *de facto* symbol of the French Republic.³ The willowy blonde actress Kristina Söderbaum, who starred in *Süss the Jew* and several other feature films that were intended to show what Germany could have expected as its destiny, if it had not been led by the Nazis, did not repeat the success of her French cousin. However, the actress' contemporary — Adolf Hitler, showed that the symbolics of the Mother of the Homeland could also be invested in a male figure. "The entire nation loves him because it feels secure in his hands, just as a child feels secure in the arms of its mother", said Goebbels, caught up in the success of one of Hitler's speeches (according to Rhodes 1984:16).

On the other hand, although the Swedish Kristina Söderbaum did not have the right to vote in the 1932 elections,⁴ the ones at which Hitler's party became the strongest in the country, her female German contemporaries did. They had been given the right after World War I, a quarter century before Italian women and Marianne's fellow female citizens, Frenchwomen. It is also true that scholarly literature, which described the time of the World Wars as the ones in which women stood at a "watershed" or "turning point", did not always interpret the change that occurred in the lives of ordinary women in terms of a victory. In other words, although the majority of authors claimed that World War I was the time in which the living standard of many women improved (they did the "male jobs" left vacant by men for three times the salary, which allowed them to eat better than ever, to buy new clothes, to go to the cinema and to

³ However, protean even before that, the figure of Marianne in thousands of sculptures and paintings (later in various souvenirs) was largely recognisable by her attributes which, it seems, were united in Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830). Catherine Deneuve and Mireille Matieu succeeded Brigitte Bardot as Marianne's newer faces. Since the nation also approved those interpretations, at the beginning of the year 2000 the Association of Mayors of France called on the country's thirty-six thousand mayors, for the first time officially, to choose the Marianne of the 21st century. Laetitia Casta was proclaimed the winner on February 19th of the same year.

⁴ Born in Stockholm in 1912, she came to Germany at the age of twenty-four to commence study of art history in Berlin. She died on February 12, 2001.

play sport), many saw that change only as an *intermezzo*. To such authors it was a situation which could perhaps have influenced the awareness of the individual, but had failed to produce long-lasting change since "the battle field — primarily the domain of the man — had economic and cultural priority" (Higonnet et al. 1987:6; Scott 1987:23-25; Woollacott 1993:129).

For reasons other than those, feminist scholarship sometimes remembers with irony the world wars. It was observed that, on the one hand, they lifted up women to the heights of Mother of the Homeland and the Mother of God on posters calling for war volunteers, or for collection of donations to the Red Cross. However, on the other, they transformed a woman into a syphilitic prostitute who fatally seduced the unwary, simple-minded chatty fellow who carelessly revealed military secrets or, alternatively, into a ruthless *femme fatale* who was a spy. In addition, this, too, in part being the outcome of propaganda, scantily dressed female actors and models in the numerous photographs which decorated bunkers, bombers and tanks bearing female names, "clearly showed for whom the men were fighting" (Gubar 1987:231).

If Susan Gubar's assertions sound somewhat exaggerated, it still seems worthwhile to consider the wartime propaganda use of the female image, which rarely deviated from three paradigmatic depictions during the time of the world wars. In one of them, the timeless one, woman personifies the nation, while in the other two that were suited to the occasion she could be identified as either good (supporting the war effort in the nation-wide call for volunteers, in help for the wounded, by working in factories or otherwise supporting the fighting men); or as bad (unaware that "walls, too, have ears", she leads her lovers into death or "encourages" the warrior in some other way). Although this ambivalence in the depiction of women became less obvious, or even non-existent, during the wars that were closely followed on television, some other ambivalences emerged out of the paradigm. One of the more important of these is the one represented by the mass media (war propaganda) on the one hand, and the autobiographical discourse (utterances about everyday life in wartime) on the other.

If one wishes to verify the interpretation of the female on the example of the 1991-1995 war in Croatia, electoral political propaganda, among other sources, will have to be taken into account: in this case, the 1992 and 1995 elections reflected the war situation.

On the other hand, it is not difficult to identify the decade of the new Croatian multi-party system (1990-2000), which will provide the temporal interpretative framework of this article, as "a crucial juncture in national history". These are just the moments which theoreticians of political propaganda differentiate from other "junctures in national history", among other, by the frequency of invocation of national symbolics, either confirming them or creating them.

Prior to the multi-party elections in the new Croatia, the female personage was shown in political propaganda, as was the case on the posters of the SKH-and-SDP (the League of Communists of Croatia — the Party of Democratic Change), as "a typical representative of the citizenry" (without any other meaning, as yet); or, as on the posters of the KNS (the Coalition of National Compact), in the face of the female lead candidate on the party electoral list, presented there so that the voters could become acquainted with it. It was only on the HDZ (the Croatian Democratic Union) posters that the female depiction meant something more. Dressed in attire similar to folk costume — not so as to locate a particular tradition, but rather to correspond with the general concept of "folk costume" — the woman's profile was shaded by darkness (the darkness, obviously, of what was still a socialist reality). Based on the model of a much earlier (socialist) advertisement for batteries, her hands were folded as if in prayer, and she carried a sparkling logotype of the political party in question. For that reason, one scholarly comment compared the poster with the Baroque popular holy pictures still found in the homes or, at least, the memories of a fair part of the Croatian population (Šiber 1992:102-103). However, in whose name was this woman carrying the torch? If the light was the HDZ (as the inscription indicated), the woman could be nothing other than a metonymy of the Croatian people. This was supported by an ostensibly banal and unimportant coincidence when, two years later, the same figure from 1990, the very same girl/woman (Sanja Plepelić, the most popular Croatian model of the time), was propelled into the war context by the HDZ. Once again dressed in "folk costume", she was now sitting at the base of the poster. With her hair loose and a smile on her face, she was holding up two fingers of her right hand in the "V" for Victory sign. She was lovely and cheerful, and a young man dressed in camouflage uniform was standing behind her. In that year of war — 1992 — a Croatian soldier was keeping her safe.

The HDZ also engaged Sanja Plepelić in the elections which were held in 1995, this time making her "an ordinary Croatian woman". By now she had doffed her "folk costume" and presented herself together with "her husband", a young, smiling businessperson, and with four of "their children", two boys and two girls. The "Croatian dream" had finally become reality. However, as the members of the HDZ often said, the HDZ was a populist party which counted on the votes of all Croats. Consequently, the HDZ's *personal witness ads* among "ordinary citizens" devoted almost half their space to women, either quite young or somewhat older, thin or somewhat fatter, with children in their arms or without children. These HDZ women could not be differentiated from those of the opposition parties: the Social Democrats also brought *a woman and a man* to the voting booth in their ad in 1995. Both sat down at a table and both took their ballot slips. Both briefly gave the matter some thought (whom

should they choose?), both of them — here the commissioner of the clip underscored their differences, classic, old-fashioned and modernistic — in the name of their roles in society, each one of them in the name of his or her half of the world: the man thought of his job, and the woman of her children. They both chose the SDP.

For that election, the political parties that were not in power showed that they wanted to be "Europe-like": they persisted in propaganda which could only marginally be identified with the word "myth", to the broad extent that the concept of "Europe" is itself broad. However, to a Croatia which was still healing its war-wounds — full of empty self-service shops and full of families in mourning — Europe was very far away. Apart from that, Croatia was still waiting in 1995 for its president to be able to board the "Freedom Train" — which had just travelled through the town of Knin, now once again a part of Croatia — and to be able to go to Vukovar. That is why, just as in 1992, the election posters and the election clips still showed young men dressed in camouflage uniform. One of the HDZ's television ads — in which the "HDZ band" put together for the occasion wished the Croatian president that God would preserve him "for a million years" and, "Heaven be praised", Croatia along with him — showed a Croatian soldier. Patiently, only slightly concerned and somewhat sad, his ladylove waited for him, recalling happy moments from their common past (these lyrical frames being shot through a fogged-over lens in slow motion). She was just like the woman on one of the best-known British mobilisation posters from World War I,⁵ like many other war propaganda images of women, and also like all those innumerable actual women whom the discursive practice of war propaganda defined as the collective "Other" to the *Just Warrior*. This practice transformed both of them, the woman and the man, into the trope of social identity stemming from the paradigmatic link which floods other actual links and other actual stories — she remained in the domain of the stereotype in order to designate everything that the man is not and, at the time, also became the reason for and justification of his going to war. In this case the model, Sanja Plepelić, was replaced by Ena Begović, the "distinguished actress" and "equally an institution of sorts of desire and sweet imaginings among the Croatian male population" (Maković 1995:25). The ad had a happy ending, because the soldier returned from battle, so that the two young people found each other in a meadow and ran into each other's arms.

The HDZ's posters and clips muffled the symbolic force of its simplistic stereotypes for the elections in 2000 (the ones in which the party lost

⁵ The message of the poster in question was: *Women of Britain say GO!* It showed a woman and two children looking out approvingly through a window from the warmth of their home, as a parade of soldiers marched by.

power). Now the propaganda of the (up-to-then) opposition was much more raucous and significant than that of the HDZ.

For the elections in 2000, the SDP's women, similarly to the women of the HSLS (Croatian Social Liberal Party), the SDP's coalition partner, had complete equality with the men. As said in the television advertising clips, one and the other had been impoverished by the HDZ's economic policy: sick people filled the waiting rooms of doctors' surgeries and hospitals, the owners of small agricultural holdings did not receive payment for the grain which they had delivered to the State, pensioners had enough money only for bread and milk, and many people lost their jobs. The new elections found "Mirna T." (shot from above in black and white, through a doleful blue filter) who had fallen pregnant and in that way given her boss a reason to dismiss her, strolling aimlessly through the streets. But hope was at hand. The camera lowered to the level of her eyes and gave them colour, and so as to be completely convincing and in keeping with the gender she represented, Mirna embraced a small child (*Elect Change — the SDP and the HSLS*).

These personal witness ads together with those of the HDZ which asserted the contrary, offered a wide range of possible opinions of the actual *man in the street*. However, theory would claim that it would be improbable that all of the ads — both the HDZ's and the opposition's — — could do a lot more than encourage those voters who were already prepared to have faith in them, at least in part. Still, perhaps it would not be out of place here to recall Joke Hermes sounding a note that cultural studies have placed far too much emphasis on the (media) texts themselves, while leaving no place to the audience.⁶ Umberto Eco asserted something similar when he was concluding his study of Fleming's James Bond novels: "Since decoding a message does not depend on the author's intent, but on the concrete circumstances of its reception, it is very difficult to divine what Fleming means or what he will mean for his readers" (according to Strinati 1995:105). However, texts never emerge and remain in *magnificent isolation*: they attain their meaning only in their relationship with the society that produces and consumes them, so that Eco, too, claims that the ideologems that he uncovered in Fleming's novels were determined by the demands of *mass culture*.

However, unlike the lines by which Fleming's famous hero complied with the demands of a mass public and which, as rhetorical stereotypes, could only be referred to by theoreticians as being a slice of reality, some of the recorded utterances which Croatian political parties used in their "election race" were undoubtedly authentic. One hardly needs imagination

⁶ In a text devoted to the media research of gender, the author drew attention to an example which, in several compared but diversely conceived research projects — once "from inside", from the text itself, and then "from outside" when the "reaction of consumers" was noted and analysed — showed that one and the same media text can contain potential for diverse and even completely converse interpretations (Hermes 1998:79-80).

to recognise in the HDZ's personal witness ads in 2000 the results of work which commenced with reporters going out into the street, and ended with a selection which was guided by set propaganda guidelines. One such utterance was that of an *elderly lady*, who explained her choice in front of the HDZ's camera in the following words: "Because it was with the HDZ and the late President Tuđman that we received what we had dreamt of all our lives, the dream of my parents and my grandfathers and me. And that was our Croatia!" She spoke in the name of those who thought as she did, but did not find themselves in the street at the right moment. How many people thought as she did, and how many the same as the "typical representatives of the people" shown by the SDP and the HSLs, was finally demonstrated by the electoral commissions' vote tallies.

The images of women in the election campaign, as in Umberto Eco's Fleming text, speak of a division of the ideologems adhered to by the Croatian political parties: between the propaganda of the HDZ and the propaganda of several large parties which had been in opposition for ten years, plotted as a clear although wavy line. The HDZ woman (in those places in propaganda where her gender was intended to indicate that this party — although "conservative", "national" and "Roman Catholic" — also recognised women as Croatian citizens) spoke in the name of two stereotypes. One of them identified her with the nation, and the other put her in her "traditional" place, in the family waiting patiently for her warrior and bringing up their children (a Croatian future). She "controlled the private sphere" just as she was, subjective, emotional and passive as she had been depicted in many scholarly deliberations on *mass culture*.

On the other hand, opposition propaganda more often "demythicalised" tradition and the woman's place foreseen by the HDZ. It did not endow her with national signifiers and did not use her to refer to any abstractions. For opposition propaganda⁷ the female was usually a voter of equal value to the man, but a voter who would decide at the elections in keeping with her view of the world, the one which some would say was still "biologically determined". However, it still will not be possible here — in the female idiom — to see this other than as one more confirmation of the "symbolic annullment" of women. In other words, as far as the opposition was concerned, women were attractive, restrained, professional, liberated..., but still only mothers.⁸

⁷ Here one should exclude those right-wing parties that are less relevant, as shown by their election results.

⁸ Certain female authors see such women depicted in various propaganda campaigns (more commercial, less political, although it is not necessary to differentiate here), as presenting the second "annulling" phase of media treatment of women, of the new trend, the one which tries in advance to defend its propaganda piece from possible feminist

Something about the image of Croatian women in wartime has already been said by the election propaganda, but a review similar to that by which the Glasgow Media Group covered the British television perception of the Falklands War would tell us even more. Particularly if it would, as Glasgow Media Group's had, combine Berelsonian⁹ "research techniques for an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" with Barthesian work in uncovering cultural meaning and throwing light on the methods of denotation upon which the semantic system of television news is based (McQuail 1992:187-190).

The text in question analyses the image of the nation at war as it was constructed by television news broadcasts, and is interesting here because of a separate chapter which depicts the conception of women in wartime. Scholars from Glasgow noted that television viewers, except at the very beginning of the war, had opportunities to hear only those interviews with the families of those who had gone to fight which spoke in support of the military action, and that it was largely women who gave the interviews. These women were not introduced by name but were shown rocking their children in their laps, while the reporters always asked them one and the same question: "How do you feel? / How did you feel?".¹⁰ This image of British women during the Falklands War does not differ very much from the image of American women presented in the media during the Gulf War.¹¹ It was the result of the censorship by which the British Government wanted to avoid the unpleasant American Vietnam experience, identifying it as the reason for "the fall in morale" that was the fault of "inappropriately censored war reports". The British Government decided that it would not "permit television cameramen to lose the battle in the field", as the Americans had done during the Vietnam War. Therefore, the reports of journalists who accompanied the British soldiers were censored, firstly by officials from the Ministry of Defence who were in the Falklands, and then by public relations employees of the same ministry in London.

criticism (Gillian Dyer, *Advertising as Communication*, according to Strinati 1995:187-188).

⁹ Bernard Berelson is one of the authors of the book *The People's Choice* (1944), the first major study of political elections. At the same time, this study is one of the first presentations of empirical research results on the outcome of communication media activities, offering proof of the "limited effects" on recipients of political propaganda messages.

¹⁰ The final conclusion of the Glasgow research related to the TV image of the female soldier: "When the first women soldiers were sent out to the Falklands garrison after the British regained the islands, the news story (...) was about what *clothes* they would wear (evening dresses for off-duty and Wellington boots for the mud)". The main character in both newspaper stories was a female cabin attendant on a ship, surrounded by 3 500 men (Glasgow Media Group 1995:102-12).

¹¹ On this point, see Rabinovitz, 1994:190-191.

So it was not possible to permit the British woman in front of the television cameras to be more than the Other to the man.¹²

However, although it is interesting and informative, it is impossible in many aspects to compare the British example with the Croatian. The distance from the "focal point of the military conflict" which facilitated the success of British censorship in attaining its goal, was quantified in Croatia by other units of measure. That was the reason, at least at the very beginning of the war, for many government and opposition voices coinciding. In any case, a full two months after the Croatian *Sabor*, or Parliament, voted in its Constitutional Declaration on Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Croatia,¹³ one hundred thousand Croatian citizens took their place in the *Bulwarks of Love* protest meeting in front of what was still at that stage the Command Centre of the 5th Military Sector of the Yugoslavian People's Army in Zagreb. The occasion gave Vlado Gotovac, a politician of unquestionable dissident charisma, an opportunity to deliver what was perhaps the most famous of all his speeches. He addressed it to "dear people of Zagreb" (who had already gathered the day before, on Thursday August 29, in response to a call issued on Croatian Television), but primarily to the women and mothers whose sons were still, against their will, doing their military training in the Yugoslavian People's Army, and some of whom had set out for Belgrade to obtain the release from the Army of their sons. The 'siege' of the Zagreb Command's building, conceived to give support to the mothers from Croatia who had gone to the capital to confront the "last guards of Communism", was intended to last until their successful return (Čale Feldman 1993:18-20; Gotovac 1995:128). The meeting lasted for three days: politicians came out onto the candle-lit podium in front of the grey building in order to "express their support" for the gathering; poets and actors gave recitals damning the criminals with their verse; singers performed to make more bearable the long periods of standing; and many mothers bore witness to their grief and their concern at the situation (Čale Feldman 1993:19). Despite the fact that it had already been directly instrumentalised politically (not only to send a message to Belgrade about the "unshakeable nature of Croatian unity in suffering", but also to call on Europe and the World to stop the war which was gaining momentum), the rally "had clear ritual features (...). The programme on the stage cannot measure up in power to the presentational-magical activity of the audience, to the numerousness of the placards, to the singing of the songs, to the swaying of the upheld hands, to the lighting of candles, to the burning of the communist banner, to the joining of hands around the key negative

¹² The BBC, known and reputed for its "objectivity", was unable to do anything but protest at the many examples of censorship which, according to journalists, far exceeded the demands of "national security". Robert Fox, a BBC journalist, later recalled what was said to him by an official from the Ministry of Defence: "We only want you to print the good news" (Glasgow Media Group 1995:81-82).

¹³ This Decree came into force on October 8, 1991.

symbol, an anti-sanctuary of sorts, in which the god of war reigns" (ibid.). The event did not rely on myths from national history. It was closer to the story of the Jewish mother whose son was imprisoned by the Romans, except that Croatia was now Judea, the generals were the Roman executors, while Europe was entreated upon not to act like Pontius Pilate (ibid.). The key concepts that mediated the messages were love, woman and child. And when Vlado Gotovac shouted: "Generals, Croatia is not afraid" he brought them into his address to the gathering:

If the generals had families, if the generals had children, if the generals had loves ones, then they would not take possession of this building. But the generals have no one, I assure you! Because he who kills other people's children — has no children; because he who aggrieves other people's mothers — has no mother; because he who destroys other people's homes — has no home. That is why the generals must know that there are no mothers, no children, and no homes for them in this country! They will die in the wilderness of their own dead hearts! (Gotovac 1995:127-129).

Gotovac saw women and children "from the other side of war" as the best and most beautiful that Croatian had: when worrying about their fathers, their husbands and their sons, and when mourning them, they were guided by their love and their dignity.

The mothers of Croatian soldiers who travelled to Belgrade in the late summer of 1991 to bring back their sons, and those who gathered in the squares of Croatian towns — wanted to share their concern and, if nothing else, to be at least a small drop in the cauldron of the miraculous elixir which, all a once, in the manner of a cloth wiped across a foggy window, would make the ugliness of the present disappear as if it had never been. They could not know that thousands of mothers would soon join them in their concern and fear, and that these feelings would be coupled with suffering and pain. Their sons would be at war, become disabled and die, while many of them a decade later would be obliged "to identify the remains" of those they had brought into the world.

The indescribable aura of those women soon started to be publicly described. That aura could serve as a welcome digression from the efforts to prove "who the aggressor was, and who the victim", or as a warning to those who believed they held the strings of war (and of peace) in their hands, in order to ensure that something similar not happen again, or at least much more rarely. The *Bulwarks of Love* became institutionalised. It had its own poster upon which the crucified Christ covered the map of Croatia. Subsidiary organisations were founded. The mothers of Croatian soldiers became *Croatian Mothers*. Their delegations travelled throughout the country and outside its borders to present the Croatian tragedy and to seek help. However, this was nothing new to the World. For example, a special 1985 edition of *Life* magazine had reminded its readers of World War II and its heroes, stating that "the Real American Heroine (...) was

Mom". *Life* then added: "Behind every fighting man was a woman... Blue star mothers had sent sons to the service; gold star mothers had lost them to the enemy". The large photograph of a plump woman over fifty years of age, with a pleasant face, dressed in a fur coat and wearing a fur cap on her head, bending to catch the extended hand of a Brooklyn ship-yard worker, was augmented with the note: "Aletta Sullivan, of Waterloo, Iowa [became] a five-gold-star mother when her sons were killed on a ship sunk off Guadalcanal". According to *Life*, Mrs Sullivan found the strength to forget her pain and go to help others. "The boys always wrote at the end of their letters 'Keep your chin up,'" said Mrs Sullivan. "And now's a good time to do just that". As Jean Bethke Eishlain commented, she then became a veritable *Everymom* (Elshtain 1987:191). Kata Šoljić was one of the Croatian *Mrs Sullivans*. She lost four sons during the war. In any case, when he alighted from the *Freedom Train* to greet the people of Karlovac, Franjo Tuđman said: "There are displaced persons and invalids of our Homeland War in this *Freedom Train*, and *Mother* Kata Šoljić is also here (...)" (Tuđman 1996:31-32; emphasis R. S.).

In the meantime, a new committed music output had started to swell the Croatian media. Hits were sung about the beauties of the homeland which had been Croatian "from the seventh century", Europe was called upon to "stop the war in Croatia, there were reports on "Croatia in flames" or that "Kekec has been liberated",¹⁴ so "its our turn", threats were made to "Mr General", promises were made that "we will be free", faith was expressed that "Croatia must win", "prayers for peace", "peace to the skies", appeals to conscience were issued because of "the children of the children of our children", the "Croatian guard regiments" were glorified, calls were made to join into "one formation (...) for freedom and for the home", and there were promises of better days to come "when the smoke clears". The popularity of these songs could be seen in the radio request programmes, in which the songs were accompanied by listeners' messages to their dear ones on the front. At the same time, television clips and images referred to the wartime reality. Many showed the suffering of the weak and unprotected. Old people, women and children no longer thought that the cold optics of the camera was revealing the privacy of their lives (or was it that the war made human privacy less embarrassing?). Quite openly they fled, tried to hide and revealed the tears on their smudged faces for all to see. When they were not running and when they were not hit, the women were there — like the woman addressed with love in a poem from the

¹⁴ Kekec is the main character in a series of books by the Slovenian writer Josip Vandot (*Kekec from Our Mountains*, *Kekec Above the Secluded Abyss*, *Kekec on the Trail of the Wolf*, *Kekec and Bedanec*) which were the basis of the films *Kekec* (1951) and *Good Luck, Kekec* (1963), directed by Jože Gale. Due to his popularity he became a kind of nation's personification.

battleground by the American poet Karl Shapiro, and like numerous unsung women in many other wars — waiting.¹⁵ In their cold, damp shelters, in waking moments when the front was quiet, beloved faces emerged from the veil of memory to warm the heart and strengthen the will. Sometimes other faces, those of children, were pressed against them, their large innocent eyes fixed on some time in the future, a time for play far from the suffocating gloom of the shelter and the yard filled with mortars. Both these faces were seen on the television screen, not only so that Croatian soldiers would be braver, but also to move the consciences of those whom the war had not touched. These women and children were shown blurred and in slow motion by the cameras, signalling in that way that this was more than mere recollection. This served to make those depicted less individual. These women and children were nearer to the concept, purified to the utmost, invoking the face of the Virgin and the Virgin and Child. This motif was directly called up by Đuka Čaić in his song *Hrvatine* [Sturdy Croatian (Male) Patriots]. While Čaić sang "Sacred things stand beside us" in the name of all Croatian soldiers, the television screen showed rosary beads, a pendant with a picture of the Virgin and Child, and a niche holding a sculpture of the Mother and Child. Just two verses later, the singer's message was "Father, guard the mother, hearth and sister / We have stood in their path and your son, the Croatian, is now enraged / Do not fear, we shall win", and a picture appeared on the screen of a woman holding a child, and then of a Croatian soldier holding a child. That clip, however, showed the other face of Croatian women in the next frame, one that was quite "authentic" and ordinary: two girls happily chatting with members of the Guards, while the singer sang "Wait for us warriors, you Croatian beauties". One learnt what was to follow at the end of the song with the message to mothers of Croatian soldiers: "Mother, prepare the bed, I shall soon return...", accompanied by scenes of a wedding procession.

The woman similar to the one indicated at the end of Čaić's song can also be seen in numerous war reminiscences and among them those of Glenn Gray:

Anyone entering military service for the first time can only be astonished by soldiers' concentration upon the subject of women and, more especially, upon the sexual act. The most common word in the mouths of American soldiers has been the vulgar expression for sexual intercourse (...).

If we are honest, most of us who were civilian soldiers in recent wars will confess that we spent incomparably more time in the service of Eros during our military careers than ever before or again in our lives. When we were in uniform almost any girl who was faintly

¹⁵ As the song says, Shapiro nurtures a feeling of love for the lovely face of his dear one, "because you wait" and "you are my home and in your spacious love / I dream to march as under flaring flags" (according to Gubar 1987:246). Shapiro won the Pulitzer for his collection *V-Letter and Other Poems* (1945).

attractive had an erotic appeal for us. For their part, millions of women find a strong sexual attraction in the military uniform, particularly in time of war. This fact is as inexplicable as it is notorious (Gray 1998:61-62).

Many graffiti which appeared on Croatian walls, just like the words of that soldier who received his recruitment papers from the U.S. Army during World War II on the same day as he was awarded his doctoral degree at the University of Columbia, testify to the same desire or, at least, to the same (picturesque) semantic use of the concept which relates to the sexual act.¹⁶ When Arif Ključanin concluded his two years of war in the Zadar hinterland, his notations of wartime graffiti numbered more than two thousand items: many of them, so many that he then decided to give them a separate place in his book, reduced women to their sexual attributes. However, the female breast and genital motifs, similarly to the male genital motif, also have their place in ordinary, peacetime graffiti jargon. One can only assume, together with Arif Ključanin and along the lines of Glenn Gray's recollections, that the war in Croatia endowed them with a much simpler yearning, stronger than the one which takes the adolescent by the hand, and draws female curves on the medium of the wall to show the street public the level of "courage" he has attained. In any case, the wonder of the embrace of love and war has for centuries filled the places of literature, always stemming from diverse origins... Veljko Barbieri and Ratko Cvetnić addressed this, as follows:

In the spring of 1993 (...) I met a plump blonde girl who was on her way by foot to an isolated military village in the Konavle Hills. We took her into our 4 x 4 vehicle. 'Sheer Rock, that's my name', she said seductively. 'I find it most exciting when I'm doing that with a soldier among the cliffs'. She wore a uniform, wandered around from brigade to brigade, hoping she would quench her thirst (...).

On another occasion, just before the *Bljesak* offensive in April, 1995 a SWAT police unit from Pakrac found itself in a cafe in Lipik in the company of three young women. They drank a bit, danced for a while and then they had to go back to the front lines, the dangerous military positions by Čaglići and Subotska. The girls went along. In the darkness of trenches they became their queens of the night, pliable,

¹⁶ Sanimir Rešić approached this theme in a much less "romantic" way, claiming that "sexual desire is close to obsession" as witnessed to by many of the noted reminiscences of war veterans, the other face of masculinity in times of war, what follows on from the experience of battle. He also "offers an additional explanation of the many rapes committed by American soldiers in Vietnam, in an absurd but plausible way. Several scholars have suggested similar interpretations of rapes, most often gang rape of Vietnamese women by GIs, as a way to inflict both humiliation and demoralisation on the enemy man as well as asserting their own manhood. To Susan Jeffers the gang rapes like the ones in Vietnam represent the most violent extreme of enforcing the collective: i.e. watching others rape while waiting for one's own turn at it. Refusing participation in these acts of male bonding led to exclusion from the group of the individual soldiers" (Rešić 1999:186).

as was the sky above them, the source of bodily inspiration in front of the deadly danger and the enemy. The scandal broke out the day after, when the girls, entirely naked, early in the morning came back to Lipik. Naked and proud, they were filled by sensual satisfaction (Barbieri 1996:146-147).

While coming back to Zagreb (...) to our rectangular home, each one of us, crumpled home guardsman, in his awakened intimacy of coming back, is coming back to those young ladies whose girlish fantasies had waited for our ceremonial images to overlay them like a poster from Croatian Soldier. We are coming back from rough ground and if you won't notice us in these few epic moments of our arrival — before we turn back to insignificant passers-by we used to be before — how could we get a move on across the battlefield again?

Can't you feel this exceptional warriors' eroticism, this condensed temporality of those who are — like semi durable sausages — today filled with life-giving juice to become rottenness and dust tomorrow. Doesn't it tickle you, young ladies, this sauce made of Eros and Thanatos (...) (Cvetnić 1997:50).

Examples of the usefulness of the female image in war propaganda could be listed *ad infinitum*. However, to me it seems hardly probable that even the longest list could show that the war in Croatia, at least as far as this theme is concerned, differed from others. Looked at from above, from the places in which policies are conceived and put into practice, or in the images written about or sketched by the *little people*, imbued with sadness because of the tragedy which was taking place, women in the war in Croatia were very like the woman summarised by Jean Bethke Elshtain in her book *Women and War* in the *beautiful soul* locution.¹⁷ (The difference lay only in the fact that, when using woman, the policy position was guided by awareness of her usability, while in the second instance the *little people* were guided by 'ordinary human compassion', that same compassion without which the female image would have been completely useless in the hands of politicians.) However, when viewed *from above*, the woman remained just as she had been in her "ordinary life": war only emphasised everything that had gone before to make her feminine.

Still, those who may be irritated by such a polarisation could well be right. All the difficulties encountered in finding a simple (easy-to-review) survey of the *image* are shown and proven, perhaps better than elsewhere, by the "case of Vera Brittain". Her diaries and letters from the time of World War I do not reveal "a born pacifist", as she usually presented herself and she herself emphasised in her later, retrospective works. She was a very young woman at that time, as Lynne Layton tells us, and she fell into the

¹⁷ She adopted it from Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

trap abhorred by all who consider themselves to be intellectuals: she was swept along from above by the induced exaltation of entry into the World War. "To-day has been far too exciting to enable me to feel at all like sleep", she wrote. "In fact it is one of the most thrilling I have ever lived through... That which has been so long anticipated by some & scoffed at by others has come to pass at last — Armageddon in Europe! The great fear now is that our bungling Government will declare England's neutrality". Vera Brittain, perhaps somewhat justifiably, hoped (as did many others) that the war would alter the order of a badly organised and listless world. Still, the force of her exaltation was such that (as she constantly pointed out) she could not regret enough the fact that she had been born a woman. As she wrote on October 1, 1914 to her fiancé Roland (who did not discover the dark side of war until he himself entered the trenches), she admitted, without any reproach: "I always call myself a non-militarist, yet the raging of those elemental forces fascinates me, horribly but powerfully, as it does you. You find beauty in it too; certainly war seems to bring out all that is noble in human nature, but against that you can say that it brings out all the barbarous too (...). But whether it is noble or barbarous I am quite sure that had I been a boy I should have gone off to take part in it long ago; indeed I have wasted many moments regretting that I am a girl. Women get all the dreariness of war and none of its exhilaration... The fact that circumstances are abnormal is not consolation for being unable to take active part in them." The war dragged on, and Vera Brittain became more and more inclined to the patriotic and religious discourse: "Next Sunday is Easter-Day. I think perhaps one may celebrate even more than one could last year, the Resurrection of England — an England purged of much pettiness through the closeness of her acquaintance in these days with Life and Death" (Layton 1987:71-74).

There still remains a question: wasn't Vera Brittain's pacifism consistent if interpreted in the times which were the cause of its emergence, and along with its subsequent transformation by the year 1957, when this English woman joined with Kingsley Martin, J. B. Priestley, Bertrand Russell, Fenner Brockway, Victor Gollancz, Richard Acland, A. J. P. Taylor, Canon John Collins and Michael Foot to form the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)?

In conclusion, it remains to attach oneself to the assertion according to which the world (western) history of war sees the personages of Joan of Arc or Calamity Jane as semiotic surprises. Such women were unexpected, and even almost non-existent, in the public picture of the war in Croatia. It was only rarely, and then shown as if self-explanatory, that a woman wore military uniform in front of the camera. Just as was said on another occasion not so long ago at the Pentagon, when General Counsel said: "She was given an opportunity to show herself" (Elshtain 1982:38). In such women, Jean Bethke Elshtain identified the traces and outcome of "militarised feminism", a fresh historical phenomenon that has replaced *woman as the reflection of the warrior* and *woman as the Other* in wartime.

However, it is unlikely that Elshtain wanted to do anything other than to extract from the history of war-making the image that was hoped to be "typical". In other words, all three still exist today, and the measure of their decibels is defined by "political priority", just as much as by "the spirit of the times" (although it is difficult to differentiate these categories in some instances). Therefore, it does not seem inconsistent that one has the obvious contradiction between the *beautiful soul* patiently waiting and mourning quietly without complaint, and the *woman warrior* who does not want to differ from that other *warrior* in any respect whatsoever. The media (and everything that stands behind them) find much more than an accessible fund in those images by which it will sometimes depict suffering and justice, sometimes compassion and justice, and sometimes justified defiance. And reality itself — it is hardly necessary here to remind oneself of the post-modern theory of the reflection — avails of the same images.

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DOMOVINA JE ŽENSKOG RODA

SAŽETAK

Politička propaganda 20. stoljeća barata s razmjerno malim brojem stereotipa, a jedan se od onih na koji se posebno često referirala odnosi na pojam Domovine poslikovljen u liku žene. Nakon što su žene stekle ustavno pravo glasa, političke su kampanje inaugurirale i lik žene radnice ili samouvjerene poslovne žene, u svemu jednake muškarcu. Ipak, i takav je lik žene, sudeći prema tvrdnjama feminističke literature, bilo tek rezultat unaprijedne

obrane od moguće feminističke kritike, a zapravo i dalje tek novim atributima ukrašeni preslik idealne ženskosti kakvu je zamislilo patrijarhalno društvo. U izvorima koji se odnose na euro-američke ratove 20. stoljeća, kao što su pisma koja su vojnici s bojišta slali svojim najbližima ili knjige, pripovijetke i pjesme vojnika-književnika, takva je slika žene posebno naglašena i, kako se čini, potisnuta u svoju krajnost. Ovdje se, najčešće, u ženi (majci, supruzi, zaručnici) sjedinjuju sve suprotnosti neugodama vojnिकove aktualne situacije: ona postaje metonimijom topline i sigurnosti doma, ali i procjeniteljicom muškosti muškarca, kvalitete koju je rat doveo pred kušnju. S druge strane, izvori svjedoče i o vojničkoj čežnji koja traži trenutno zadovoljenje, čežnji koju je ratna propaganda u ratu suprotstavljenih strana obilato koristila, a znanost često tumačila kao želju da se u takvoj, krajnjoj situaciji, upotpuni doživljaj života, jednako muškaraca i žena. Ženski lik kakav se oblikovao za trajanja rata u Hrvatskoj 1991.-1995. godine spomenutomu nije iznimka. Također, u javnoj slici rata u Hrvatskoj, kao i u drugim ratovima s kojima je moguće valjano usporediti, lik je žene-ratnice i neočekivan i nepostojeći.

Provjera opisa žene i, preciznije, opisa mjesta koje ona zauzima u medijskoj slici rata, kada se sučeli s relevantnim "opisom" izniklim iz analize druge, pa i klasične etnografske građe, donosi važne spoznaje o utjecaju medija masovnog komuniciranja na oblikovanje javnoga mnijenja, spoznaje koje umnogome proturiječe još "važećoj" postmodernoj teoriji medija. Također, one ponovno upućuju na meritornost etnografskoga pristupa u istraživanju medija.

Ključne riječi: etnografija medija, lik žene, rat