

## ON GENDER-AFFECTED WAR NARRATIVES

### Some Standpoints for Further Analysis

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Under the impact of feminist and postmodern anthropology the issues of *engendered* violence in war and witnesses of trauma are discussed through the voices of women themselves: through their war diaries, essays, fiction writings, testimonies, recorded narrative and psychoanalytic interviews. This article is my very first attempt to present ethnographically a number of different female voices in wartime Croatia. Their narratives reflect different experiences, social engagement and unequal possibility to contribute to the public discourse where contrasting social constructions of war reality and the interpretations of recent events are still being offered.

### On traumatic experience and women's autobiographical writings

In his novel *The Ghost Writer*, Philip Roth describes how the character Anne Frank named after the author of an acclaimed child's war diary, saved by chance, would have felt uncomfortable in the world of those who survived the Second World War, those who failed to learn from history; how to avoid new wars and new crimes against humanity or how to be

more sensitive to the suffering of others. Roth tries to explain why Anne would have concealed her identity as a surviving victim; marked for life, not only by a body-print of a concentration camp number and embodied traces of traumatic experiences, but also by her new social status as an uprooted, stateless and homeless outsider. She would have found it hardest to bear the distrustful curiosity and the ever-present disbelief of her new neighbours - interrogators who could not and would not want to believe that things had been just as they indeed had.<sup>1</sup>

Zlata Filipović is a well known little girl from Sarajevo and her work is the most read of those who have tried to veritably present a puzzling war reality of Bosnia-Herzegovina. While the worldwide reception of *Zlata's Diary* put accent on her compelling child view of the "blurred" war reality in Sarajevo, she noted in her diary "Some people compare me with Anne Frank. That frightens me, *Mimmy* [the name she gave her diary]. I don't want to suffer her fate" (1994:159; note written on August 2, 1993). While the "blurred" war reality in former Yugoslavia corresponded with the widespread image of the Bosnian conflict as a Balkan type of civil war as well as with the world authorities practice of mystifying its main causes and perpetrators, Zlata simply wrote about the real danger the citizens of Sarajevo faced day after day only because most of them tried to live as they used to live before (within the frame of multiculturalism and interethnic trust). In the context of such live circumstances in besieged Sarajevo and the limited opportunities of departure, she also described her ardent desire to leave Sarajevo and her firm belief that media reception of her diary would contribute to her decision. Although most of the refugees' and war victims' moving accounts are doomed to anonymity in the media-

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<sup>1</sup> Recently after the Second World War, the survived internees of concentration camps have willingly testified about their experiences publicly - on radio shows, in newspapers, magazines, and books. Subsequently, the number of their published testimonies has rapidly decreased due to the lack of interest on behalf of the potential audience as well as the resignation of survivors who tried to find their place in new circumstances. As one of the authors tried to explain: "It is the absence of this market of buyers and readers - indicating the indifference of public opinion once the initial shock had passed - which partly explains why the stream of testimonies came to an end" (Wievorka 1994:27).

-saturated world,<sup>2</sup> both Anne and Zlata are the names which symbolize the suffering of children and civilians in the relentless wars (of our time) because they found a moving mode of writing about it by presenting fear and the enactment of violence through everyday life patterns.<sup>3</sup>

The success of some female autobiographical war literature is even larger if we know that the persisting experience of fear, injury and pain - even if painfully stamped on one's body apart from the trauma accompanying that experience - is hardest to make acceptable and "familiar" to others. According to some theories derived from psychoanalytic sources and affected by the literary theory and linguistics (cf. Felman and Laub 1992; Hartman 1995), one cannot be made entirely conscious of the existence of *trauma* for it cannot be "fully retrieved or communicated without distortion" (Hartman 1995:537). Thus, it would be wrong to say that traumatic experience is "nearer" to those who even themselves suffered severe injuries, humiliation and attack on their personal integrity or who are endeavoring to lock those experiences behind in their past.<sup>4</sup> This approach addresses broader theoretical questions - especially when encountering the historian's domain - connected with representations and verbal mediation of personal (past) experience, the type of knowledge shared by trauma witnesses, the "aid of testimonial literature" for those who either write or read about one's own painful experience and the act of listening i.e., the role of the listener as a

<sup>2</sup> What the witnesses of the atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina have to testify is just too dangerous at the moment, not for us or the international community which ineffectively contributed to the maintenance of the *status quo*, but dangerous for themselves. They strike at their target directly, accusing people on whom the fate of their loved ones depends - some imprisoned, some missing, some trapped on the other side, and some unidentified bodies in mass graves. The countless victims are silenced forever because it is possible in war to destroy the traces of a person's biography: all the material proof of the existence of a specific individual in a specific time and place: including family albums, education certificates, identity cards, and the archives in which their copies were filed.

<sup>3</sup> A few editors have also followed this successful formula by publishing books such as *Dear Unknown Friend: Children's Letters from Sarajevo* (published by the Open Society Fund, New York) and Anna Cataldi's (1993) *Letters from Sarajevo: Voices of a Besieged City*.

<sup>4</sup> The problem of oral communication of one's own experience, particularly those stored in memory and uttered after an elapse of time, has been described at length within various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, folkloristics, narratology, and anthropology. Their joint conclusion is that memory is a social process of selection and interpretation of the past - full of stereotypes, re-invented symbols and ready-made statements of reality - largely effected by the recent experiences of the one called upon to remember and current interests of the community to which she or he belongs. The category of the past as a concretization of a time category is closely connected with the act of narration and the world view which is yet to be comprehended and "perceived as a concept having complex and subtle relationships to many, perhaps ultimately all, narrative genres" (Schrempf 1992:13).

"co-editor" of the outcomes of witnessing. Although the traumatic event "seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche" (Hartman 1995:537), every attempt to recall it in the memory is a complex process of reconstruction defined not only by personal psychological features but also by language (already) included in the perceptual troping of event on the backdrop of the socio-cultural context.<sup>5</sup> Dori Laub, a prominent representative of the psychoanalytic approach, remarks - the testimony to the trauma as "the narrative's address to hearing" cannot exist without the presence of the listener:

The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to - and heard - is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the events comes to be inscribed for the first time (Laub 1992:57).

Our ability to listen and to hear the testimony of the people we can hardly identify ourselves with, interferes with broader political, social and practical daily circumstances which affect our habits not to listen to countless painful testimonies, not to listen to that what we think we already know and particularly what we don't want to know at all. The foregone conclusions and preconceived dismissals are the legitimate procedures to convey not only the knowledge of trauma, but the body of knowledge shared within the same community.

If the trauma is shared by most of the members of a community, the victims' identity - expressed through symbolic, religious and memorizing practices - is often the main frame of identification processes. The lived experience of fear, violence and death contributes to the self-perceived victim's identity which often exists regardless of the perceptual framework of an outsider. The authors concerned with the identity issue (for example Butler 1990 and Bhabha 1994) assume that the identity polity is defined more by gender, shifting ideology and socio-cultural context than by ethnic and family roots, so that the political arena is the very realm of establishing and regulating one's identity. As the *peacetime* society is

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<sup>5</sup> The anthropological access to the same issue reconsiders the problem of how to evaluate the difference irreducible to common language patterns whose "pledge" is the lived experience of violence, exile or the loss of close relatives and friends. Although experience and understanding of the world are largely determined by language and discursive practice, anthropologists are prone to claim that "life experience is richer than discourse" (Bruner 1986:143). However, since the interrelations between testimonial discourse and public history are multilayered, the discourse on lived experience is more than composition of stereotypes of autobiographical writings, stereotypes of collective memory, shared visions of reality, folk narratives, popular images, and symbols mediated through the mass-media.

characterized by the variety of a person's individual responses to the identification dynamics affected by ethnicity, occupation, social background, age etc.; the harsh war reality, within which different threats, allegiances and loyalties are formed, sets permanent pressure of a new kind on one's identity construction. In the situation of resistance when the entire community is threatened by exodus or extermination, this construction is however "formed more in tactics of survival rather than strategies of power" (Nordstrom 1992:30).<sup>6</sup>

Although female scholars' and intellectuals' writing does not provide a difference itself, women's critical writings in Croatia at the beginning of the war represented a challenge to the official national discourse's ideology of patriotism and sacrifice in many ways.<sup>7</sup> The war entailed the disintegration of Yugoslavia provoked ideological controversy and disagreement among Croatian women's peace organizations and movements, among feminist and other female intellectuals, regarding the type and direction of women engagement (cf. Povržanović 1995). Prominent authors such as the philosopher Rada Iveković, writer Dubravka Ugrešić, journalist Vesna Kesić, and the journalist and writer Slavenka Drakulić - who has written "about the other side of war, the way it changes us slowly from within" (1993:2) - warn us of the publicly suppressed forms of intolerance and violence in our small communities and of the perilous militarisation of everyday life. Drakulić is one of the very few Croatian journalists who contributes to American journals and magazines and whose opinions are highly valued; especially about the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe as the political and moral vacuum in which nationalist politics and leaders came into power providing people with an essential new sense of identity. Drakulić (1993) asked herself why the turn

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<sup>6</sup> "Students of oppression and resistance may enrich their study through awareness of their expectations of how conflicts can and should develop. This is a necessary step in the ethnography of resistance, for oppression can exist in the culturally grounded perceptual frameworks of those who view and assess the values of resistance. These frameworks, or structures of evaluation, have a multitude of components, but one of their primary element is time" (Parnell 1992:154).

<sup>7</sup> The pictures of women and children's faces with tears - as the most vulnerable and most injured party in the war - became dominant in public media appealing to solidarity and patriotic sentiments on the national level as well as to the compassion of the world policy authorities. On the contrary, after the Croatian army was successful on the battlefield, the public space was overwhelmed with narratives of those who, as one Croatian journalist said - *step directly into the national history*. And this phrase correlates with the feminists' critic of the interpretations of the official history as a history of wars and male achievements. Namely, that women are imprinted into it only through mediators in the process of multiple mediation - through their husbands, their sons, their suffering and tacit loyalty (cf. Sklevicky 1989). As feminist authors have pointed out so many times, for women to step into history means to begin writing, to step into *écriture*.

from "normal cultural repertoire" towards the culture of intolerance, towards destructive textualization of hatred and narrativized frightening and threat, was so radical in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup> She was also looking for the modes of documentary-like literary presentation of her authentic witnessing of what was happening in Croatia "in a series of personal essays that have the style and beauty of short stories".<sup>9</sup> The voices of those whose fate was in many ways affected by the war and its aftermath - displacement, intolerance and latent ethnic animosity - were incorporated in her reflections and moral condemnation of all sides included in the war.<sup>10</sup> The engagement of the aforementioned authors and the place the discordant discussion about them occupied in Croatian public in 1991, contributed to the very picture of Croatia as the open space wherein different responses and options took place alongside the strong ideologisation and upsurging national rhetoric in the society threatened by war.

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<sup>8</sup> Dubravka Ugrešić - whose fiction books include *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* (Virago, 1991), *In the Jaws of Life* (Virago, 1992) and *My American Fictionary* (Cape, 1994) - has tried to describe the lack of the "normal cultural repertoire" in socialist Yugoslavia and the large impact of trivialized form of popular culture on everyday life of the representatives of its nations and nationalities which she perceived even as the "essence" of the Yugoslav identity: "Today, when ex-Yugoslavs meet (...) They no longer remember party congresses, or years of change, or the replacement of political terminology every ten years, or the years of "self-management", or the names of political leaders, they hardly remember their common geography and history: they have all become Yugo-zombies! But what they do most frequently and most gladly recall are the years of festivals of pop music, the names of singers and songs. In other words, they remember the history of triviality (...) And it is just this culture of the everyday - and not a state or a political system! - that is the source of Yugo-nostalgia, if such a thing exists today" (1994:11).

<sup>9</sup> The part of the text about the author from book's dust jacket (Drakulić 1993).

<sup>10</sup> The discourse of a few, not only female, intellectuals was primarily read as a form of resistance to the tacit rules of what was speakable and what unspeakable in the war conditions, to whom and on what occasion. The repertoire of forbidden topics includes such taboos as - not to ask about the causes of individual deaths and the mistakes of military authorities, not to "dramatize" isolated cases of violation of human rights and ethnic animosity, not to speak about imperiled women's position in war when entire communities are expelled, and not to set off negative tendencies in society which can contribute to the low morale in general. The discourse of some female authors intends to oppose the "myths of purification" of national narrative, but being also mixed with personal grief and even general denunciation, it became an "ideal" scapegoat of public condemnation. Namely, some prominent female authors were subsequently attacked and labelled *witches* by the press. One of the problems was a nondistinction of the different levels of their engagement - as writers and as private citizens - to which these authors contributed themselves writing essays based on the fine tangle of documentary and fiction which met with success in the West. Besides, they have often used the common rhetoric pattern of the fate of intellectual exiles in the Western culture interpreting their temporary leaving not as a result of political decision, but in the terms of refugees' fate.

In the early years of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the success with which both female discourses (the child war diary and Croatian women's professional writings) have met in the West - reveal the readiness of its public space to support this way of portraying reality in former Yugoslavia which contributes to the general preconception of "civil war" in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina where all sides equally *produce* potential perpetrators and potential victims.<sup>11</sup> While the interpretation of the nature of these wars needed to be supported with facts obtained from *reliable* sources, the close view on the dirty war's tactics and the main perpetrators of atrocities and mass sexual assaults was revealed with new zeal. The feminist interpretation - in conjunction with the outsider and insider women's activism in providing help and medical assistance for the victims of sexual assaults - was then respectively read with new interest. Cynthia Enloe, a prominent feminist author, has pointed out the importance of domestic women who had helped collect, distribute and analyse the information about the rapes "in their own terms" (1994:221) in regaining a new social position by signifying every rape seriously "as a conscious attempt to control and humiliate women" and rejecting "the patriarchal convention of imagining men's rape of women as merely a natural part of wartime's politically dulling litany of 'murder-pillage-rape'" (ibid.).

However, the postwar Croatian female discourse is still an open arena wherein it is necessary to establish a socio-cultural, political and intellectual "alternative configuration of gender" (Butler 1990:147). This should be in opposition to those intending to institutionalize women only as the victims or the symbols of national sacrifice and resurgence, as the visible (at the memorializing events) but mute signs of loyalty. The question that still remains open is - how to transfer the discourse of the inexpressible, the silenced personal truths into the historian's domain or who can be the spokesperson i.e., what and whose frame of identification is *desirable* for the women who have written all their pain and hope on the

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<sup>11</sup> Becoming part of exile discourse, most Croatian female accounts in the Western media share common features as well as the stereotypes of dissident narratives. According to Velčić (1996), these features include: "First, the 'hero' is constituted through an initial break with his/her natural filiation. Second, the reasons for the break could be identified in political terms. Third, the hero's life goes on and his talent is crowned with success. The three constitutive dimensions are still regular in the stories about the modern experience of exiles produced by the Western media. They are, of course, adapted to different historical contexts, to the particularities of different cultures and personal experiences. Nevertheless, such a three-step biographical pattern may be observed in most of the accounts given by the intellectuals coming from former Yugoslavia" (1996:53).

bricks around UNPROFOR and IFOR headquarters in Zagreb with the names of their murdered or still missing loved ones.<sup>12</sup>

### **Verbal violence as a device of torture**

Apart from the theory which emphasizes the features of collectiveness of war and trauma witnessing and speaks about it in terms of collective autobiography, I follow the approach which, although recognizing common patterns of language by which we express sentience, points out that "injury must at some point be understood individually because pain, like all forms of sentience, is experienced within, 'happens' within, the body of the individual" (Scarry 1985:65).

Verbal violence which accompanies the conflict between representatives of different ethnic or political affiliations in the same society is more observable due to the simple fact that the people involved in it speak or use the same language. While the nature of language is to replace things, people, and deeds which are not present, in the form of words; the role of speech as a device of torture is *to do things with words*, to make pain, to provoke emotions, to demonstrate absolute power and dominance of the speaker. Different examples, which I have found in the corpus of written and oral testimonies and personal narratives (cf. Prica 1992, Stigmayer 1994, Hundred... 1994, Kesovija 1994, Olujić 1995a, 1995b), show that every act of verbal violence as a device of torture implicates three kinds of relationships: relation to oneself and to others, relations to power, and relation to truth and justice. If somebody is more convinced that the third related element - the truth - is on his or her side, he or she takes justice in their hands more easily and finds less reason to justify his or her deeds morally.

Actors in the act of torture do not communicate - the torturer often demands that victims confess something i.e., to repeat whatever the torturer insisted upon in order to demonstrate the victim's helpless positions.<sup>13</sup> To take away someone's right to speak freely and to defend her - or himself is an outright violation of basic human rights, but to force prisoners to talk nonsense in order to accuse themselves is even more so. The perpetrator

<sup>12</sup> "Economically secure professional white feminists could not, likewise, speak for any women whose situation is different. No one in fact could assume the right or obligation to speak for 'others' let alone against the oppression of anyone whose identity is constructed as 'other'" (Harvey 1993:109).

<sup>13</sup> Regarding verbal violence towards female prisoners in women's camp in Bosnia, besides torturing with rape, beating or killing their children or husbands in front of them, torturers often have forced victims to say that they are there of their own free will, that they are proud to be expecting Serbian babies and to deny their connections with family, past lives, and ethnic origins (cf. Stigmayer 1994, Olujić 1995).



wants to turn the victim into an object; to destroy everything that makes a human being unique and irreplaceable. In addition to this, the message "You are all the same!" directed to the tortured persons as well as to the *enemy*, is of the same origin - to perceive people not as individuals, but as a nameless crowd, as objects. And this mode of communication full of general accusations is the most risky for society which wants to alleviate the war burden and to become a society of pluralistic democracy. But, how does one stop making general statements, searching for individual guilt and constructing stereotypical images, since the mass media continues to do this worldwide? However, there is no place to discuss at length the manifold connections between media in war looking for sensations of the most morbid kind and the will of perpetrator to draw attention.

For the victims, the number of potential "penalty observers" also increases during each day of life in exile - apart from the efforts of the government of the victim's own state to use the destiny of women raped to touch the consciousness of the world audience, there are authorities of host countries which select those who can prove that they were detained in a detention camp in order to get immigration permits much easier. In addition to this, even some feminist theorists perceive women's tragedies separately from their families, community and the ethnic origin in the name of which they are "punished" (cf. Olujić 1995a, 1995b).

Although the issue of woman's honor, as Marija Olujić has illustrated in several of her articles (1995a, 1995b) seems to be crucial to the understanding of social and gender relations in all of the former Yugoslav republics, it cannot be fully understood without contrasting it with other values held hierarchically by that community. Consequently, the attitudes towards some anti-war campaigns were clearly negative in Croatia at the beginning of the war as they were in Serbia. But, the political nature of the conflict and the fact that military operations of the Serb-led Yugoslav Army took place on Croatian territory, caused that the greatest number of deserters came from Serbia. It is not predictable since in most Serbian communities a refusal to serve in the army equals treason as the most effective way to excommunicate someone from political and social life, while, on the other hand, the motif of treason becomes the central figure of their self-perceived interpretation of national history. So, the fact that a Serbian woman hid her son in order to protect him from conscription seemed to be sufficient for having the same fate as other Muslim women imprisoned with her; her son was killed in front of her eyes, and she was taken to a rape camp (see Kesovija 1994:60).

Instead of giving numerous examples and quotations from testimonies which would illustrate the strategies of the enactment of a male torturer's dominance over the female prisoner where verbal violence is

especially important, I only want to refer to one case where a young woman under house arrest was successful in trying to win over the torturer of her age by means of a "friendly" conversation. In 1991 at the age of 22, she was forced to stay with her mother in the occupied village of Lovas, Eastern Slavonia:

It all started with... he got an order to kill me. Then I, I don't know, I mean, I didn't know whether to believe him or not, anyway, ah, I wasn't permitted to say anything, and then he started, um, what do you know, accusing me... that I was responsible for deaths of many people, as, in fact... Well it's true that there are lots of people in my village... and he, um, told me that these murders needed to be justified, that someone had to be blamed (...) I don't know how I could do it... well - I started talking with him a little about... (...) And we talked about that a lot: he insisted on his opinion, that no emotions were involved in it, I don't know either... then I wanted, you know, to soften him a little bit, or something like that. Nothing. Then he again... there are no emotions, he has to do it and whatever, and, little by little, through conversation, and it was something new, I started talking, trying to show that I never really cared about national differences, for we lived in that kind of a place, on the border, where the population was really mixed and that it really didn't make any difference regarding who was who, that my best friend was, you know, she was from a mixed marriage... and, little by little, he started telling me about the girlfriend he had had at the seaside and, finally, I won him over... (Prica 1992, ms IEF 1392).

On some other occasion, the same man (who already had a criminal record because of rape and robbery in former Yugoslavia) tried to "justify" his behaviour narrating about his "historical right" of winner:

But we were just - I was sitting on the bed having only my undershirt and tights, 'cause, you know - I had to take my trousers off - I was sitting there and we talked. He was talking to me about Serbia, their history. He said that they were winners throughout history, that we had taken all their songs over, and that all those Croatian songs that are now being sung are in fact Serbian songs we had taken over and changed the words. I mean, he was really assuring me to the extent that you finally don't know - after all you have experienced - whom to believe... You start, you know what I mean, not to believe it any more, neither history nor... Anyway, this story drives you crazy. And, .., it's already six o'clock. I put some clothes on. He was talking all the time. I had to, you know, do it with him a couple of times more - so I got afraid when he said: "Now you're just talking with me so that I couldn't do you anything" (Prica 1992, ms IEF 1392).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In 1991, the girl with pseudonym Sonja (born in 1969), was a student from the village of Lovas in Eastern Slavonia. After keeping her under house arrest in Lovas, a Serbian soldier took her to Pančevo (Serbia) as his "private prisoner". With the help of his

Through analysis of oral and written, male and female testimonies about experiences of torture accompanied with what we can call simply *verbal violence*, we can single out several main objectives. First, to justify violent acts making the tortured person admit fictitious crimes i.e., to provoke a sense of guilt which should confirm that it was a "just" avenger or retaliation. Second, to disregard the very meaning of *real* sufferings of the tortured person as well as the part the torturer takes in it. It is possible when the perpetrator introduces an *abstract* level of ideological discourse about the guilty side in order to make the sufferings of the tortured person historically relative. Third, the role of evoked emotions in the act of torture - often connected with the presence of the members of family - is to contribute to the absolute dominance of the executor who turns a deaf ear to the requests and begging for freedom.

### Violence in gender related narration

The retelling of painful experiences is usually observed from two interrelated points of view; the first regards the relations of narrator towards verbal discourse, and the second regards those to whom the witnesses' accounts are addressed and about testimonies conveyed and often distorted by public media or, as Baudrillard said, "in the shadow of the silent majority". The first viewpoint emphasizes the victims' reluctance to speak about their past, but also the conviction that narration should help them make their unbearable experience bearable and that what is beyond human comprehension can arise through narration as almost familiar. The second standpoint is more concerned about the role of testimonies in the new historiographic discourse where a sense of shared unpleasant events is more relevant.

As perpetrators of crime address their acts to a larger community in the name of which they committed crime trying to connect feelings of past glory or past injustice with future images of national happiness, the stories of lived experience of violence as narration of sacrifice also tend to take part in creating public history. The public space, culturally and ideologically, is characterized by processes of selection and censorship; higher national interest determines which stories should be heard and retold, whose testimonies should represent the historical destiny of the nation or become the pledge of a brighter future (cf. Jambrešić 1995 and Jambrešić Kirin 1996).

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friends she managed to escape to Croatia. The interview was recorded by Gordana Koruga, transcribed by Irena Plejić.

The victim's reluctance to place his or her experience not only in public speech, but also in private conversation, is more obvious in the case of young female victims who felt themselves marked by past humiliation to be objectified into medical cases; they are frightened to be different and are afraid of not being really understood. They often express willingness to leave the country and start again in a new environment. But, on the other hand, we have perceived the victim's ability to recognize the most individual feelings and the most confident thoughts in the narration of others, and that is the reason for promotion of group therapy and joint narrative interviews with female victims.

Although every analytic approach to victim's narration of pain, grief and lust for life, carries the moral and intellectual risk of trivialization, of missing the point, the scholars' efforts to record these morally compelling, emotionally evocative and ideologically provocative personal accounts can help strengthen communicative competence and self-esteem among war victims, encouraging their active presentation in publicity. It can also contribute to the multivocal discourse in society - as it is case in Croatia - for they integrate a different vision of reality (different resources of knowledge, and a different explanation of what was happening to them and why it was happening in such a cruel way), with common concerns for the future of the world.

Offering preliminary accounts of my current research on the differences in communicating experience of the Second World War and recent war conflicts as well as of prewar and wartime period - comparing autobiographical war writings with oral personal narratives, comparing discourse of personal accounts with the media presentation of testimonies, comparing male with female accounts - I intend to confirm the importance of a firm human belief in justice and renewal beyond manifold cultural and ideological stereotypes tied with verbal discourse in (post)war circumstances. I also want to stress the fact that the exiles of both sexes - especially of rural origin and lower social stratum - are deprived of their own voice. Very rarely do they try to describe their experiences and feelings in some kind of testimonial literature as a device of coping with tensions, distresses, or threats, and communicate them to a larger audience.

Most male authors of testimonial literature often unravel the semantic tensions of their story at an ideological level interpreting his personal sacrifice as a matter of common cause, as suggested by makers of public history. Men more easily tell their stories as "objective" witnesses and thus take part in the testimonial discourse, which they comprehend as a struggle of memory against oblivion, a striving for the "true history". As one of the authors has written: "I shall be happy if my narratives help to uncover the truth about the suffering of thousands of innocents whose

supreme ideal was freedom of their Homeland" (Tica 1994:96). Male authors also narrate their experiences chronologically intending to dispose a plot of events logically in order to present a trustworthy image of war.

An anthropologist (engaged in ethnographic work with Cypriots' refugees in 1970s) stresses the material and symbolic importance of homes to the women and the fact that women often speak of "two losses which they felt particularly sharply, and which affected them more than their menfolk: the loss of their homes, in whose contents they had, in the recent boom years, taken such pride, and the loss of the compact community of kin, friends, and neighbours" (Loizos 1981:176). In addition to the prevailing feelings of homesickness and grief because of destroyed households, the identity crisis dominant in mostly female oral narratives of displaced persons in Croatia is grounded on the experience of the past as already disintegrated: narrators look back to the pre-war time for something solid to lean on, but the image of home(land) and peaceful coexistence with *others* is mistrusting by the prevailing strategy of public history where every positive reference to a socialist past is marked as "yugo-nostalgic". Despite of that ideological obstacle for remembering, personal narratives testify about the prewar everyday life as a trust-driven cultural realm not lacking tensions, distrusts, conflicts, but also full of numerous examples of support and understanding among neighbors of different ethnic and cultural background. Female narrators refuse to base the point of their shattered narratives on "specularities". Their stories are told as a series of dramatic episodes, presenting almost the same moral lesson; the purposelessness of war atrocities. They also testified that there is no ideology, no phrase which could relieve or eliminate the grief, pain, and worry they still experience, not as refugees or returnees, not as Croats or Bosnians, but as mothers and wives.

Oral or written, extracted or spontaneous, narratives on life in war and exile do not bear witness to us of direct, palpable events and facts as much as to the conventions in presenting *one's own* experience, observations, and feelings within the framework of the symbolic and ideological patterns of a specific community. But, the question provocatively occurs with any further attempt at articulation (in oral and written traces of memory) of lived experience of pain, humiliation, and fear connected with situation of resistance and feelings of social solidarity and survival energy within the society. Thus, testimonial discourse represents admirable scientific and moral challenge for every researcher speaking on the conditions of verbal representations of the very reality of human suffering in - but not only - ethnographic texts.

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