

## CROSSING THE BORDERS: CROATIAN WAR ETHNOGRAPHIES

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As the ethnographic representation of fear, death, symbolic resistance and strategies for keeping up the practices of everyday life in war entails not only epistemological, but also ethical and political issues, reactions to Croatian war ethnographies (written by insider anthropologists and folklorists from 1991 to 1994) have often depended on the emotional and political positioning of readers. In this article, such reactions from Western European and American audiences are presented in order to show that in the complex web of personal, political and representational processes in scientific discourse, political judgments on the war in Croatia have so far been crucial.

*"Objectivity must be replaced by an involvement that is unabashedly subjective as it interacts with and invites other subjectivities to take place in anthropological productions. Knowledge, in this scheme, is not transcendental, but situated, negotiated, and part of an ongoing process. This process spans personal, professional, and cultural domains.*

*As we rethink 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in anthropology,... we should also work to melt down other, related divides. One wall stands between ourselves as interested readers of stories and as theory-driven professionals; another wall stands between narrative (associated with subjective knowledge) and analysis (associated with objective truths). By situating ourselves as subjects simultaneously touched by life- -experience and swayed by professional concerns, we can acknowledge the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities."*

(Narayan 1993:682)

### **War ethnographies (from victims to authors)**

The war that started in Croatia in 1991, victimized most Croatian citizens.<sup>1</sup> Numerous people had to confront the shocking violence, destruction and

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<sup>1</sup> Some parts of this article have been presented at the panel "Receptions of Violence: Reactive After-Texts, After-Images and the Post-Ethnographic Site" (chair: Allen Feldman), 93rd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, 1994, in a paper entitled "Public Culture and the Reading of War Ethnographies: Croatia, 1991–93".

expulsion. Also those who did not have to experience physical danger and suffering, had no chance to avoid the war completely. Most people became poor due to the war, many lived in fear for their male family members who joined the army, and almost everyone was consuming the media war reports.

After the initial shock of a war on their doorsteps, most intellectuals and artists in Croatia in late 1991 chose not to remain speechless, but to act. It was not so much that remaining passive was seen as amoral, but rather that intellectuals and artists found inaction as emotionally unbearable. In addition to composing, giving aid-concerts, shooting photos or painting, *writing* has been recognized not only as a way to join the resistance, but also as a way of maintaining personal integrity. From anti-war appeals, documentary brochures and newspaper articles, to letters, diaries and poems, writing (esp. that which was made public - published or presented in the media) has been recognized as a way of resistance, as well as a means to handle the fears and anxieties (see Prica in: Čale Feldman et al. 1993b:44–69). All ethnographies written in that period could be included in such *written answers* to the war, although the ones dealing with the war itself at the same time implied a profiled scholarly interest in the phenomena they were analyzing.

Because of the war - and especially because of the fact that symbols of Croatian cultural identity were one of the main targets of Serbian aggression - many Croatian anthropologists and folklorists have recently been implementing projects and publishing articles on various facets of Croatian cultural identity. Such projects and articles are not discussed in this article. It deals exclusively with the ethnographies of the war in Croatia written by insider anthropologists and folklorists from 1991 to 1994. By war ethnographies I understand ethnographies dealing with cultural phenomena provoked by, kept intact in spite of, or changed due to the war situation.

Regarding the war in Croatia as the context for writing and reading of ethnographies discussed here, it is crucial to understand that there was no single *Croatian war experience*. The everyday experience of the inhabitants of Zagreb (including the authors of all war ethnographies), of the inhabitants of so-called crisis regions, and those who were forced to leave their homes, varied to such a degree that it was not possible to encompass it in general terms. On the one hand, that made possible the "distancing" that enabled Croatian anthropologists and folklorists to engage their professional view on the shocking reality which was immediate when looking in from outside Croatian borders, but so very "other" when looking from their Zagreb homes that remained unimpaired... On the other hand, the nonexistence of a single Croatian war experience jeopardized the taken for granted advantages of their insider position. The authors had to confront manifold moral dilemmas in the times when other ways of acting (doing humanitarian work, for example) seemed to be more urgent and perhaps more proper than writing (see Čale Feldman et al. 1993b:1–4).

As "subjects simultaneously touched by life-experience and swayed by professional concerns" (Narayan 1993:682), the authors of Croatian war ethnographies recognized and admired the creativity involved in the manifold aspects of symbolic resistance to the aggressors. They were also puzzled by the fact that many everyday practices have been kept intact regardless of the war raging in some parts of their country. As victimized civilians, they understood so well that keeping up everyday routine is the only way to maintain one's integrity in war.<sup>2</sup> As scholars, they tried to translate this understanding into academic knowledge (see Rihtman- -Auguštin 1992; 1993; Čale Feldman, Senjković, Prica 1993b; Povrzanović 1992a; 1993a; 1993b; 1994).<sup>3</sup>

The authors' basic motive for writing about the war was the confrontation with some new cultural phenomena, and not the reexamination of the basic assumptions about fieldwork and anthropological research models in the Croatian academic setting. However, their published texts provoked theoretical discussions on the profoundly destabilized character of our describing the Other - among their Croatian colleagues, as well as among the foreign colleagues whose reviews will be mentioned later. It is important to stress here that most of the authors of Croatian war ethnographies share the new self-consciousness of the discipline, most influentially voiced in the anthology *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus, eds. 1986).<sup>4</sup>

For the authors of the ethnographies introduced here, James Clifford's claim that "(C)ultural *poesis* - and politics - is the constant reconstitution of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices" (Clifford 1986:23–24), has become (sometimes painfully) self-

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<sup>2</sup> Writing war ethnographies in the midst of the war was also a way of keeping up everyday routine for the authors!

<sup>3</sup> Other Croatian war ethnographies that are not referred to in this article are published in English in the book *Fear, Death and Resistance* (Čale Feldman et al., eds. 1993a). Several other ethnographic texts dealing with the war will be available in English in a collection of papers presented at the international conference "War, Exile, Everyday Life" (Zagreb, March 30 – April 2, 1995) organized by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research.

<sup>4</sup> The war ethnography written in summer 1991 (published in English as Povrzanović 1993a) has been published in Croatian together with translations of Clifford's (1986) and Rabinow's (1986) articles from *Writing Culture*, as well as with the translation of Sangren's (1988) article on rhetoric and the authority of ethnography, and the comments following it (see *Dometi* 1992). They are accompanied by an article highlighting some key points of postmodern anthropology with regard to the position(s) of insider anthropologists and the concept of Otherness dealt with in the frames of *anthropology at home* (Prica 1992; see also Prica in this issue). Another article introducing some theoretical positions of Clifford, Marcus, Fisher and Tyler into Croatian anthropology (Povrzanović 1992c) has been written in the context of developing a research project on everyday life in war. It discusses the questions of locating Otherness, adequate writing strategies and the personal motives for writing.

evident - both in the process of writing, and in the still ongoing process of dealing with the reactions their texts have provoked in various contexts.

As regards the academic context of their efforts, Clifford's claim has been understood not only as an important caution, but also as a kind of theoretical comfort and hope. Being aware of the manifold limits of representation, and of the political and emotional determinations of their scholarly efforts, some of them made themselves truly visible in their war ethnographies.

In opposition to anthropological texts dense with theoretical analyses, emphasizing generalized statements, the war ethnographies discussed here do not suppress vivid particulars, but create powerful images by replacing distance with the acceptance of more *experiential and affective modes of knowing*.<sup>5</sup> Evaluating each one of them is not within the scope of this article; as they are available in English, any interested reader can judge their qualities by him/herself. However, it can be argued that most of them - being laden with stories and thus offering an evocative flow in other people's experiences - can be labeled as *narrative ethnography*.

Being sensitive to the fact that it is people who (should) populate their texts, most of the authors succeeded in letting people speak out from their writings. Being attentive to the concrete realm of everyday reality, they chose the contextual and interpersonal approach to knowledge.<sup>6</sup> The predominant essay form of their ethnographies did, on the one hand, prove to be more flexible and less totalizing than the other forms of writing. On the other hand, it caused ambiguity regarding the questions of evoking vs. representing, of the shifting borders between literary and scientific discourse.

### **Listening vs. reading ("propaganda" vs. "honesty")**

Croatian war ethnographies, especially the ones dealing with everyday life in war, can be considered as sequences of separate tellings in search for a common theme, or - following Stephen Tyler's (1986) suggestion - as collections of telling particulars and anecdotes which portend a larger unity beyond explicit textualization.

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<sup>5</sup> Distance "is both a stance and a cognitive-emotional orientation that makes for cold, generalized, purportedly objective and yet inevitably prejudiced forms of representation" (Narayan 1993:680). It can be replaced with the acceptance of "more experiential and affective modes of knowing" (Kondo 1986:75) in which the ethnographer's identity and location are made explicit and informants are given a greater role in text. Such methodology and discursive style emphasize the subject's experience and involvement with others in the construction of knowledge (see Narayan 1993).

<sup>6</sup> The fact that all Croatian war ethnographies have been written by women, could be a promising starting point for interpreting their epistemological qualities.

Perhaps that is one of the important reasons for the fact that Croatian anthropologists and folklorists who had the chance orally to present their war ethnographies abroad, were often (especially in 1991 and 1992, at the time of the most intense warfare in Croatia) treated exclusively as *natives* (and not insider *scholars*) - inevitably taking sides, partial in political terms, or even blinded with emotions. (They were invited to give lectures or papers on the basis of their war ethnographies for different audiences in France, Great Britain, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Italy and the USA.)

However, it should be stated here that the intense interest in Croatian war ethnographies (most of them published in Croatian in 1992) expressed by foreign colleagues who heard about them thanks to a presentation given at an international folklorists' conference in Jerusalem in late 1992 (see Rajković 1993), was crucial for the decision made by the director of the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb to publish them in English. The book *Fear, Death and Resistance* (1993) appeared only four months later.

Our Western colleagues were genuinely interested in hearing more about the war in Croatia, also from insiders' perspectives. Many of them were distressed, some were puzzled and concerned, few were irritated by the lack of professional tools for understanding why it was happening.<sup>7</sup>

Manifestations of that irritation were sometimes present when we orally communicated our writings on the war at **lectures to foreign scholarly audiences** between 1991 and 1994. Talking about the suffering of real people - without concealing one's strong emotions, was felt to be an intrusion, an unwelcome extension of the scientific discourse that should be detached - and not disturbing - for the listeners.

Such irritation was most often translated into disbelief, sometimes voiced as an accusation of "proliferating Croatian propaganda". Although most of the foreign scholars and students who heard us lecturing on the basis of our war ethnographies would agree that partiality is unavoidable in writing ethnographies, some of them seemed to believe that our main scope was to manipulate their feelings in order to make their political judgments as "pro-Croatian" as possible. In general, the (tacit or voiced) accusation of "proliferating Croatian propaganda" was not pointed (only) to the fact that an author was writing *partial truths* (see Clifford 1986), but implied that she was writing no truths at all.

Another type of reaction called into question the very character of the texts upon which our lecturing was based. If the ethnographies discussed here are not acknowledged scholarly status, but treated as diaries (fieldwork-diaries, or even private ones), they can be regarded as utterly personal: the

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<sup>7</sup> For an example of a mixture of strong emotions, suspicion, and irritation (provoked by the war itself, but partly also by the way the reviewed ethnographies are written), see Kretzenbacher 1993.

revealed experience can prove nothing.<sup>8</sup> For being so overtly burdened with emotions, the texts can be read as an excess, incompatible with the sanitizing powers of scientific discourse.

But the first and the most usual reaction when it came to our lecturing abroad, was the one directing the entire discussion exclusively to the role of the war-time mass media on the Croatian and Serbian sides (sometimes trying to convince the - supposedly unaware - Croatian speaker that she was as manipulated by her media as the - basically innocent - Serbs were by theirs). As Allen Feldman (1994) pointed out when analyzing such an insider-outsider encounter, the questions on Croatian media practice and form provided "a reassuring social narrative" for the audience. Focusing on the role of the war-time mass media helped "smoothing the broken plane of cultural presupposition" and left "historical and experiential chasm" between the outsider audience and the insider author nonacknowledged. "What about the media?" was the central question not only in the situation in early 1992 analyzed by Feldman, but literally in *all* situations of personally presenting our war ethnographies across Croatian borders. Therefore, Feldman's question on "how does the periphery speak truth to the center if the very construct center/periphery is conditioned by the inadmissibility of alien sensory experience" (Feldman 1994:406), remains crucial.<sup>9</sup>

Let me posit here that the immediate (thus primarily emotional) reactions to the orally presented war ethnographies decisively depended on the biographical experience of the listeners, at least in the 1991–92 period. By that, I am pointing not only to the lack of a direct war experience, but also to the fact that knowledge on ex-Yugoslavia, as well as former contacts foreign scholars (as well as journalists) had with the country and its peoples, vary to a great degree. Such contacts proved to be a starting point not only for outsiders' reading of Croatian war ethnographies, but also for their anthropological interpretations of the war in Croatia.<sup>10</sup>

The reactions mentioned above have been encountered in the situations of our giving lectures and presenting papers to foreign scholarly audiences in Western Europe and USA. **The reading of the printed war ethnographies** most often induced discussions about the role of the intellectual in war. Although (similarly to questions on media practice and form on Croatian and

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<sup>8</sup> See Povrzanović 1993a - the text focusing on production and functions of fear in the context of wartime everyday life, as well as on the strategies of adaptation to war circumstances.

<sup>9</sup> In this context, the only exception was the kind of interest expressed by students in a German anthropological seminar. But that was most probably due to the fact that Croatian war ethnographies were the basic texts they were working on for a whole semester: very detailed reading preceded listening. Also, it is very important to stress that the workshop took place in late 1994, more than three years after the beginning of the war in Croatia.

<sup>10</sup> See for example the articles written by American anthropologists in *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 1993.

Serbian sides) they could be regarded as a way of silencing the crucial political content, such discussions offer a possibility of the reader's identification with the author's position(s), which makes possible a dialogue in the frames of the profession. The questions on the roles/predicaments of the insider intellectuals/anthropologists in a society at war, have been welcomed by the authors of Croatian war ethnographies: they prove that the writers have been read as anthropologists, and not merely as Croats or angry war victims.

Some foreign readers of Croatian war ethnographies were especially sensitive to ethical questions (along with the practical ones) an insider anthropologist has to confront when writing in the midst of war. Nora Dudwick, an American anthropologist recently working in Armenia, confirms that the "sense of ethical responsibility to interpret the war honestly, in a way which neither inflames nor ratifies interethnic violence, raises the issue of competence", that "the anthropologist who tries to satisfy both sides risks losing the trust of both", and that an anthropologist attempting to convey the reality of one of the sides at war, faces "the danger of appearing one-sided or naive at best; of inadvertently becoming a mouthpiece for nationalism or racism at worst" (see Dudwick 1994). I believe again that her biographical experience (in this case the one that has to do with her own position in the process of writing war ethnographies) was one of the most important reasons for her ability to understand an insider scholar's position.

The insider anthropologists' self-reflexive personal narratives have been regarded as "very important" and have been highly esteemed by Western audience (in letters, personal contacts, and reviews), I suppose not only because they openly reveal the authors' positions and the decisions made in the process of writing, but also because self-reflexivity in broader terms is The Topic of anthropology today.<sup>11</sup> Articles thematizing anthropological self-reflexivity in a war situation (Povrzanović 1992b and 1993c) have been published abroad without any editorial modifications. An American review posits that one of the Croatian authors, among several, "accomplished considerable objectivity by attempting to make herself visible in the text, visible to the point that the text becomes not one about the war, but one about whether there can be objectivity from either the insider or outsider. Her comments, along with the fragments of texts from the media she selects, are

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<sup>11</sup> "... I just came from class where your article was one of the ones discussed and it was the basis of a very lively discussion about the role of the intellectual in war. You can be proud of the honesty and feeling authenticity that comes across the article. It is very useful reading for students" (e-mail comment by an American anthropology professor on Povrzanović 1993b). See also Salvioni 1994, where the Italian anthropologist discusses the current anthropological self-reflexivity, taking Rihtman-Auguštin 1992 as a starting point. See also a review by Regine Bendix (1994), in which she acknowledges that the Croatian war ethnographies, although "driven to the extremes of reflexivity", avoided the pitfall of lending unintentional legitimacy to a catastrophic human state when studying the war as a cultural situation.

an interjection of her 'authorial voice', an interjection that she is self-conscious about. But, this doubt gives a legitimacy and continues the awareness by Jambrešić (see Čale Feldman et al., eds. 1993a, M. P.) on the 'bifocality' of subject and object in documenting this cultural moment in Croatia" (Bennett 1995:261).

In the period from 1991 to 1993, the reactions to Croatian war ethnographies have depended predominantly on the emotional and political positioning of the readers. This holds true for audiences at home and abroad alike. However, there is another, more recent type of reaction the Croatian authors welcome most and hope for in future, that is the reading of their war ethnographies as complex and provocative anthropological texts. Such was the already mentioned reading by German anthropology students, as well as a review by an American anthropology professor (Bennett 1995). Such is also the reading by an American-Swiss anthropologist who stated that "the perspective on the war remains a Croatian one,... but the volume offers both moving and insightful paths toward understanding the attempts to deal with the chaos of this particular war. Almost all contributions combine ethnographic data with sophisticated analyses... the mixture of perspectives and data at once disturbing and fascinating, makes for compelling reading" (Bendix 1994).

As the book *Fear, Death and Resistance* (Čale Feldman et al., eds. 1993a) is finding its way to interested foreign colleagues, it is resulting more and more often in invitations to the authors to participate in various symposia and workshops. Consequently, they are being regarded not as exotic Others, but as equal partners in a dialog induced by their writing. Perhaps this is due to the time that has passed since the beginning of the war in Croatia. Outside Croatian borders, just as within them, the possibility of talking about the war in the past tense makes such a dialog much easier than it was three years ago. The unease mentioned before seems to be dissolving for us all.

### **War and politics (who is impartial?)**

When it comes to writing and reading about a war, in the complex web of personal, political and representational processes in scientific discourse, political standpoints and political judgements seem to be decisive. In that regard, this article is one more proof for James Clifford's claim (1986) that ethnographies - and this holds especially for war ethnographies that are read in the context of the war they are depicting - are determined by forces ultimately beyond the control of either an author or an interpretive community.

Croatian anthropological and folklore research institutions have neither been ordered nor recommended (by the ministries financing them) to produce texts on the war. The war ethnographies presented here have come out of



personal affinities of the authors whose scholarly interests were directed towards contemporary everyday life, long before the beginning of war. By making decisions regarding the topics, the rhetorics and the strategies of writing in a war situation, they had to make political choices in ways much more direct and open than in normal circumstances. Being insiders, they were totally exposed to the communities they were writing about. Also, the war in Croatia has been happening in the midst of a wider shifting of social paradigms i.e. of the reconstitution of social values in the context of the decay of communism, and the building of a nation-state. In the first months of war, what was interpreted as cool distancing in the process of turning the tragic events into an "anthropological object", was sometimes regarded as morally inappropriate and therefore met with suspicion. So, the very decision to write about the war was a political act - not to mention the choice of particular topics, such as political kitsch, nationalism and the death of soldiers, or the kind of questions posed to displaced Croatians. On the one hand, such choices might have been risky when it came to Croatian readership's reactions. On the other hand, the cultural critique implied in some Croatian war ethnographies, as well as the mere readiness of their authors to try to deal with the immediate reality turned upside-down, have been regarded as courageous - among intellectuals at home and abroad.<sup>12</sup> Some readers have even recognized them as direct political engagement, although this has not been the authors' intention. In this regard, it should be no surprise that when giving lectures abroad based on war ethnographies, the very first (and the most usual) reaction my colleagues and I met was not really a reaction to the text, but a question - more or less direct, more or less polite, more or less prejudiced -

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<sup>12</sup> The article entitled "Poetics of resistance" (Čale Feldman, Senjković, Prica 1993b) induced the most numerous and the most interesting reactions. It consists of three separate texts - on political rituals, on visual symbols of resistance, and on ordinary life in war - written by three authors in the midst of the most intense war events in Croatia during winter 1991/92. In searching for an answer to the question whether anthropologists should serve the national cause by attempting to establish an indisputable notion of 'Croatian identity', or whether they should rather deal with ongoing political and daily life, focusing on the elements of contemporary expressive culture through which Croats articulated their political aspirations, their fears and the determination to resist the aggression against them, the authors chose the latter perspective. Lada Čale Feldman wrote about "public events" which encompassed all forms of collective theatrical behavior with an either magical, religious or political impact, during the pre-war and war period. She interpreted them as parts of a consistent process which reflected all the key moments of the Croatian "social drama". Reana Senjković analyzed the profusion of traditional and newly formed national symbols in visual arts (elite and popular) connected with war themes. She showed how symbols and signs were transformed with regard to daily political events and social changes from the 1990 elections to the war events during the days in which the article was being finished. Ines Prica's war ethnography offers insights into the processes of disintegration of social values in war, and their reintegration into new systems, as revealed in everyday war experience.

about our political positions regarding the breakup of (ex)Yugoslavia and the present political system in Croatia.

In April 1993, a lecture on newspaper death notices as a way of establishing identity of people killed in this war (see Rihtman-Auguštin 1993) given in an ethnological seminar in Rome, reduced some of the listeners to tears. A month later, the text of the lecture was submitted for print in their anthropological journal, but it was never published: in the meantime, Croatia had been identified as an aggressor in Bosnia, and the editors of the Italian journal chose not to take any risks by "proliferating Croatian propaganda". (The author was tactfully told this several months later by a friend of hers who is a member of the editorial board). It seems that the political context was crucial for their reading of a Croatian war ethnography, regardless to its epistemological or textual qualities.

I had a similar experience in Germany, with a text on fears caused by war events as expressed in the letters from Croatia (Povrzanović 1992a). The editor of a journal for peace-pedagogy invited me to write it, but then insisted that I should skip all the parts in which the aggressor (that is Serbia and the Yugoslav People's Army) was named. I agreed on "purifying" the text for the pacifist journal by reducing it to the quotations and my comments only, but with some basic data on the main war events in Croatia (including the official numbers of victims and damaged cultural monuments) separately outlined beside my article.<sup>13</sup> The article was printed, but the little square with the statistics on the war was not. Instead of the promised square, there appeared an illustration: a sculpture entitled "The Earth in Ashes" (T. Lenk 1959). The photo had been taken from a catalog of an 1987 exhibition called "Terror and Hope. The Artists Looking at Peace and War". That was the editor's way of publicly reacting to the war in Croatia - which he no doubt felt obliged to do - yet avoiding to take a position.

A colleague who participated in a radio program on the book *Fear, Death and Resistance* (Čale Feldman et al., eds. 1993a) in summer 1993 in Paris, told me that the book itself, although announced as the only theme, was only mentioned. She was confronted with the journalists (one of them introduced as an expert for (ex)Yugoslavia, the other Jewish, wearing a David's star button), who took the opportunity to *attack* her with claims that Croatia is a neo-fascist state. She found herself in an absurd position: the people she was supposed to talk with about the book she had edited, had never read it, but were irritated by her insistence on differentiating the efforts

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<sup>13</sup> As for me, insisting on such numbers in an anthropological essay was not only a way to place its topic into a wider perspective. In 1992 - when Croats still had to fight for the mere recognition of the fact that Croatia has been militarily attacked, and that there was no war in (ex)Yugoslavia, but in Croatia (and later in Bosnia-Herzegovina) only - such insisting on the knowledge on the proportions of destruction definitely was a political act.

made by Croatian anthropologists and folklorists from the Croatian war propaganda. Only listening to the (recorded) program can reveal the intensity of emotions mutually invested in the conversation that finally turned up into a quarrel which made my colleague stop talking and try to cope with the trauma of being militantly reduced to being just a *Croat*, who, by definition, is blindly supporting the ruling party, if not agreeing with its fascist character. That was an extreme, but all the same, a paradigmatic situation.<sup>14</sup>

The reading of the articles written by foreign anthropologists (as well as by many journalists) who tried to explain the war in Croatia (and sometimes justify the reasons for Serbian military aggression) should not be based on an a priori positioning of the authors in a way described in the previous paragraph. However, the readership should question the foreign authors' partiality in political terms.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, theoretical and rhetorical devices can easily obscure in(ter)ventions by an author seeking to establish an authoritative text. Because of the interdependence of epistemological and political issues, *writing war* should be polyphonic, and the authors should make themselves visible as much as possible. Partiality is unavoidable as in all other writing contexts, but when it comes to the war, supposed (or even pretended) impartiality could range from unfair to (politically) dangerous. Insider anthropologists crossing borders in order to "prove" that their (partial) truth is "the right and only one", will most probably discredit their scholarship and politically harm their country. But the political damage done by presumably impartial insider anthropologists, can be even more serious - not for them, nor their academic community, nor their country, but for the people they are writing about. Quoting Nora Dudwick (1994) again: "Anthropologists working in conflict situations cannot escape their own responsibility as interpreters - and therefore participants in political violence. This responsibility may be even more acute for 'foreign' anthropologists."

However, instead of using the paradigm which emphasizes a dichotomy between outsiders and insiders or observers and the observed, I would agree with the proposal that "at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and

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<sup>14</sup> In the same French radio program, *ethnicizing* the war in Croatia by the civil-war- -formula was accompanied by some reed pipe tune - a metaphor for remote Otherness, meant to confirm that there is nothing to be done about the Balkans, obviously being "at the wrong side of history" (Kundera).

<sup>15</sup> Croatian readers were rather irritated by the title of the 1993 special issue of *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*: "War Among the Yugoslavs". Namely, (ex)Yugoslavia officially ceased to exist on January 15, 1992, when the UN recognized Slovenia and Croatia. Therefore, such a title inevitably provokes interest in the political positions of the editors.

flux... (W)hat we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas" (Narayan 1993:671).

Anthropological writing could not stop the war in Croatia, nor can it change the inequalities in today's world. However, different reactions to Croatian war ethnographies that evoke the tension between understanding and critical judgment, bear the potential to change some readers' attitudes in regard to the recent political events, socioeconomic developments, and institutional changes that have transformed the frames within which anthropological writing is enacted and understood. Talking about Ines Prica's war ethnography (in Čale Feldman et al. 1993b), Brian Bennett stated that with Prica he understood why the authors of the ethnographies published in *Fear, Death and Resistance* (Čale Feldman et al., eds. 1993a) felt the need to get the book "out to a Western audience, an audience that too easily accepted the easy definitions and explanations about the cultural and war situation in Croatia; the easy explanations of journalists and politicians who wanted to dismiss the situation and therefore dismiss dealing with it" (Bennett 1995:259).<sup>16</sup>

Along with such politicians' and journalists' explanations, some Western readers' reactions to Croatian war ethnographies have to be understood in the context of postmodernist refusal to acknowledge the dictates of certainty, and the questioning of all kind of hierarchies of authorities and their narratives. Postmodernism has banished the vocabulary of distinction and evaluation: in the postmodern cultural continuum, there are no good or bad politics. The deconstruction of "principled positions" creates a value vacuum which easily leads to a state of ethical and political paralysis (see Squires, ed. 1993). Therefore, more foreign readers of Croatian war ethnographies could follow their authors when it comes to relating the notions of value and justice to the anti-totalizing spirit of postmodernism. The taken-for-granted ways should be recognized as sociocultural constructions for which we can exercise responsibility not only when it comes to writing ethnographies, but also when it comes to reading them.

Let us hope that the existing Croatian war ethnographies, as well as future ones, will induce some new ways of examining the effects of power in different contexts, and thus offer new meanings to what has often been called

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<sup>16</sup> "There is a legitimate critique that European thinking dismissed Croatia's plight by reducing and stereotyping the Croatians into an association with the WW II Ustashe government's extremes and dismissed Croatia, along with the other participants in the conflict, into ethnic 'Balkan' mentalities. Lawrence Eagleburger, as US secretary of state, dismissed the war in Croatia by saying that they were all insane in the conflict and that they would have to simply exhaust themselves before the West could deal with it" (Bennett 1995:259).

*exploring and testing the limits of cross-cultural learning.* Perhaps they will make the privileged outsiders become more aware of the complex relations between power, history and knowledge in the wider cultural dynamics of post-communist societies which are enmeshed in war.

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