

# **The Phenomenon of 'Zeleni kadar' and the Memory of World War I in Croatia**

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Submitted to

Central European University

History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2015

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## Abstract

At the moment the Austro-Hungarian State disappeared in late October 1918, the atrocities of the war, shortages of basic life necessities and rising discontent among the people, created an atmosphere of general collapse. In this situation, the deserters in Zeleni kadar and uprising population throughout the countryside of Croatia and Slavonia, formed a phenomenon which appeared abruptly, brought turmoil and war-like experience to the hinterland, and ended as the new regime established authority by the end of December 1918. This thesis analyses the topic from two angles. Firstly, the nature of the Zeleni kadar and the categories of the people involved in its activities will be examined in order to provide a clear sense of the atmosphere which dominated life in the late months of 1918. This analysis consists of soldiers' motives for desertion, attitudes of the peasantry, which was the largest part of the society, and influences which determined the course of the Zeleni kadar's activities. In the other part of this work, memoirs and literary representations of the First World War are compared *vis-a-vis* observations based on existing historiographic research and contemporary official documentation. This approach requires thoughtful critical treatment of this body of literature, since the nature of autobiographic accounts traditionally bear methodological issues for historiographic research. However, a critical insight to the content of literary and memoir accounts, here opens possibilities for a comprehensive grasp of the phenomenon of post-war upheaval in the former lands of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The dissolving of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of the First World War is often seen through the lens of political history. Although this time framework fits the topic at hand, this thesis specifically deals with the Croatian case. More important, political life and ‘grand narratives’ on this period will only serve as context for the events which took place in the late months of 1918. Therefore, this work will present a view from ‘below’, with the war-weary population and the participants of various subversive activities aimed against different forms of authority in its focus.

The main manifestation of this development at the end of the World War I in Croatia was the appearance of Zeleni kadar,<sup>1</sup> which was a phenomenon primarily consisting of the deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army, but strongly backed by the locals, who shared their negative feelings towards the ‘exploitative elements’.<sup>2</sup> The formation and activities of the Zeleni kadar, which was composed of these categories of people, requires an investigation based on recent historiographic research and relatively accessible data from the contemporary official documentation. This thesis will therefore contain the explanation of the phenomenon of Zeleni kadar through critical interpretation of contemporary sources and historical methodology. However, often colourless official reports will here serve to supplement (or question) the established academic view.

The individual memories of the war veterans and literary representations of the period, however, provide us with a more vivid picture. “The front was horrible, but back in the

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<sup>1</sup> Zeleni kadar, literally meaning Green Cadre. This meaning of the term will be explained at the beginning of the second chapter.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase is used from contemporary dictionary and depicts various groups of people, which the peasantry and the men in the Zeleni kadar saw as ‘exploitative’; see: Željko Martan, “Ustanak ‘pokvarenih elemenata’ protiv ‘izrabljivačkih elemenata’: nemiri u sjeverozapadnoj Hrvatskoj potkraj Prvog Svjetskog rata” (The Uprising of the ‘Rotten Elements’ against ‘Exploitative Elements’: Unrest in Northwestern Croatia at the end of the First World War), in: Vladimir Huzjan (ed.), *Varaždin i sjeverozapadna Hrvatska*, pp. 593 – 624.

Monarchy, in the hinterland, it was even worse. The soldiers from all areas and of all nations, as they returned from their military leaves, openly asserted: ‘Back at home, they’re constantly taking and commandeering. The women and children have nothing to eat. Everyone is hungry, but the minority acquires great wealth, exploiting the misery of society and individuals. After the war we’ll deal with these frauds and war profiteers.’ That was the general attitude at the front.”<sup>3</sup> This account, written by Ante Messner-Sporšić, who served as a military priest in the Croatian Home-Guard<sup>4</sup> division at the Italian front, provides us with an image of the atmosphere among the Austro-Hungarian soldiers and foreshadows the emergence of disorder and upheaval at the point the structures of Habsburg Empire fell apart, in a way no official report could. This kind of literary representation which refers to the end of First World War in the Croatian context, along with other memoirs and literary works, will present a fabric for our understanding of the complex topic of the deserters, returning soldiers and common people participating in violent discharge of discontent in the late months of 1918.

This thesis will utilize on the versatility of the source material available. More precisely, some established historical notions on the nature of the Zeleni kadar and upheaval in Croatian lands at the end of 1918, supplemented with the available official documentation, will be reconsidered and possibly expanded through consultation of individual experience transferred through the literary genre. The contribution to the topic of Zeleni kadar and the cultural history of transitional period after the First World War, will therefore emerge in the treatment of this body of literature in the manner of historical sources. Furthermore, these works will provide us with a different discourse on other more tangible evidence, which

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<sup>3</sup> Ante Messner-Sporšić, *1915 – 1918 Odlomci iz ratnih uspomena* (1915 – 1918 Fragments from the War Memories), (Zagreb: Tipografija, 1934), pp. 180 – 181.

<sup>4</sup> The Home-Guard, or the Honvéd, was a branch of the Austro-Hungarian army formed after the 1867 Compromise. The common branch was the Kaiserliche und Königliche Armee (The Imperial and Royal Army), from now on k. u. k.

enables us to comparatively evaluate the weight of traumatic events for the witnesses of the turbulent fall of 1918.

## 1. APPROACHING THE TOPIC

This chapter will introduce the secondary literature and the sources I intend to analyse in this thesis. The historiographic research on the topic of Zeleni kadar and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian authority in Croatia and Slavonia has, as we will see, developed in the course of the last ten years, and will be introduced in the first part of this chapter. In the following pages I will also present the primary sources and methodological approach, which regards the interdisciplinary problem of memory and the issues of literary representations of individual experience of the past.

### 1. 1. Historiography on the Zeleni kadar

The historiographic contribution to the period of World War I in the Croatian case is often seen as falling short of contemporary needs and possibilities. Even if the works of national historiography deal with this subject, they are almost always a part of political or military discourse, and usually present narratives which deal with subsequent events in the interwar period.<sup>5</sup> The understanding of this situation in the Croatian academic circles appeared with the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, and the need to further the research of this period with a wider array of social science tools.

This overview of the academic concern over the topics regarding the Great War and the Zeleni kadar in particular, should start with, what I would argue, is the most important monograph of a more recent date; Filip Hameršak's *The Dark Side of Mars. Croatian*

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<sup>5</sup> See: Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* (Contemporary Croatian History), (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1999); Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918. – 2008.* (Croatia 1918 – 2008), (Zagreb: Europapress Holding, 2008).



*Autobiography and the First World War*.<sup>6</sup> In this recent book, the author indicated the need of a vigorous approach to the topics concerning the war period, claiming that he “realised that there are vast research areas, which in our case fall out of interest, whether because they seem irrelevant, or because an appropriate methodological ground is still missing.”<sup>7</sup> This statement briefly sums up the issues of Croatian historiography. Although Hameršak himself is not a historian in terms of professional training, his grasp of literary criticism, paired with concise use of historical method, formed a much needed monograph of interdisciplinary character, and thoroughly addressed the possibilities of researching the period of World War I through the use of autobiographic literature.

Furthermore, two editorial books dealing with this period, should be mentioned. The first one, based on the works of participants of the scientific symposium in 2008, published by the Croatian Institute for History in 2010, and simply named *The Year 1918*,<sup>8</sup> presented a much needed widening of the approach; apart from political issues in the World War, the authors addressed the social and cultural situation in the Croatian lands, agrarian problems and brought up some relevant archival material. The other book, *Varaždin and the North-Western Croatia in the Great War 1914 – 1918*,<sup>9</sup> although of a more local character, presents an interdisciplinary approach to a wide array of case studies, predominantly of military character, but also of social and cultural content, with an article by Željko Martan, closely dealing with the topic of this thesis.<sup>10</sup> In this article the upheaval at the end of 1918 is

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<sup>6</sup> Filip Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa. Hrvatska autobiografija i Prvi svjetski rat*, (The Dark Side of Mars. Croatian Autobiography and the First World War), (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Filip Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Zlatko Matijević (ed.), *Godina 1918*, (The Year 1918), (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Huzjan (ed.), *Varaždin i sjeverozapadna Hrvatska u Velikom ratu 1914. – 1918*, (Varaždin and the North-Western Croatia in the Great War 1914 – 1918), (Zagreb – Varaždin: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Željko Martan, “Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'”, pp. 593 – 624.

described as an anarchic state, and put in the context of horrible life conditions which ensued with the war taking its toll on food supplies, war depression and emerging epidemics.<sup>11</sup>

Other valuable (and more recent) research on the World War I in Croatia was published in three editions of the periodical *Croatian Review*.<sup>12</sup> Although the works contained in the two numbers from 2004, with the rise of interest for these topics, already seem outdated, they still provide the basis for further research. On the other hand, the more recent edition of the periodical published in 2014, comprises thematic units which point to the fact that the gap in the methodological research, which Hameršak addressed in his book, is finally being filled; these thematic units are: “The Great War from ‘Bird’ and ‘Frog’ Perspective,” “Views on the main Characteristics of Croatian Identity before and during the Great War,” “A witness of the Time” and “Everyday Life in the War.” In the end of this review of contemporary Croatian historiography, I would like to point to a noteworthy attempt to categorize the groups in the *Zeleni kadar* by Tomislav Bogdanović.<sup>13</sup> Although his approach sometimes seems methodologically shaky,<sup>14</sup> it presents a valuable contribution to our understanding of the topic at hand.

The real issue of Croatian historiography, when it comes to the phenomenon of *Zeleni kadar*, is the legacy of Yugoslav socialist period historiography. Although the quantity of the works produced in the 1950’s can be described as satisfying, the obvious influence of Marxist philosophy, interlaced with some more ideologically charged observations, renders these works’ quality questionable from today’s perspective.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the Austro-Hungarian

<sup>11</sup> Željko Martan, “Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'”, pp. 600 – 607.

<sup>12</sup> *Hrvatska revija* (Croatian Review), vol. 2, 3 (2004), vol. 3 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Tomislav Bogdanović, “Kategorije zelenog kadra 1918. godine i osvrt na njihovo djelovanje u Podravini i Prigorju” (“Categories of Austro-Hungarian Army Deserters in 1918 (So-called Green Cadres, as they hid in the Woods”) and their Activities in Podravina and Prigorje), *Podravina*, no. 23 (2013), pp. 96 – 108.

<sup>14</sup> I will address the issue of *Zeleni kadar*'s categories later on.

<sup>15</sup> This body of literature will be evaluated more thoroughly in chapter 2. 2. “Further Interpretations: Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks”.

deserters, disbanded soldiers and peasantry at the end of 1918, although one-sidedly interpreted here as Bolsheviks and revolutionaries, were introduced into an academic discourse through the works of Bogdan Krizman, Ferdo Čulinović and Konstantin Bastalić.<sup>16</sup> Although the issues in these works will be addressed later in chapter 2. 2, it should be noted that the main contribution of these historians consists in their aim to tackle with the numbers of the Zeleni kadar.

In the body of literature in English language, references to the Zeleni kadar are expectedly rare. The only foreign author who found his interest in this topic is John Paul Newman, and his article “Post-imperial and Post-war Violence in the South Slav Lands, 1917 – 1923”<sup>17</sup> is the only work in English dealing closely with the k. u. k. deserters and ensuing revolt after the First World War. However, monographs dealing with the Great War and Austro-Hungarian case in particular, are of great importance because they provide us with the context for the specific case of Croatia and Slavonia during and immediately after the war. Although from today’s perspective certainly outdated, Edward Crankshaw’s approach to the topic of the dissolution of the Danubian Monarchy, with a strong emphasis to traditional tropes of national issues within the State and focus on the Austrian and Hungarian case, should be taken into account, because it provides a context for the topic of this thesis.<sup>18</sup> David Stevenson’s book *With our Backs to the Wall* is of a more recent date, and gives an overview of the belligerent’s economic situation, social circumstances and war conduct.<sup>19</sup> In this work

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<sup>16</sup> See: Konstantin Bastalić, “Stvaranje stare Jugoslavije“ (The Creation of Old Yugoslavia), in: Ivan Kampuš (ed.), *Narodi Jugoslavije u borbi za slobodu* (The Peoples of Yugoslavia in the Struggle for Freedom), (Zagreb: Znanje, 1959); Ferdo Čulinović, *Odjeci Oktobra u Jugoslavenskim krajevima* (The Echoes of October in the Yugoslav Lands), (Zagreb: 27. srpanj, 1957); Ferdo Čulinović, “Zeleni Kadar“, (The Green Cadre) *Savremenik*, vol. 4 (1957), pp. 124 – 142. Bogdan Krizman, “O odjecima Oktobarske revolucije i zelenom kaderu“ (“On the Echoes of October and the Green Cadre), *Historijski Zbornik*, vol. 10 (1957), pp. 149 – 157.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul Newman, “Post-imperial and Post-war Violence in South Slav Lands, 1917 – 1923“, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 19, no. 3 (August 2010), pp. 249 – 265.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House of Habsburg*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

attention is given to the circumstances which lead to the general failure of Austro-Hungarian administration and military at the end of the war, which sheds further light on the appearance of the Zeleni kadar in the Croatia and Slavonia.

In this body of literature in English, Mark Cornwall's book *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*<sup>20</sup> is relevant because of its approach to national and social questions in the Habsburg Monarchy, and their effect on the war machinery and soldiers' attitude, which was liable to various forms of ideology and propaganda. Furthermore, his editorial book *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary*<sup>21</sup> has brought to play an array of political and national issues present in the Monarchy on the eve of its demise. It appears obvious that the literature in English, which is of relevance for the topic of Zeleni kadar in the sense of giving a wider context, mostly deals with national, political or military questions. Although looking at the period of the late months of the Great War through these lenses can help us to understand the nature of upheaval which ensued with the loosening of the State's grip on its subjects, a more thorough approach will be needed, one going beyond consultation of the secondary literature.

## 1. 2. The Primary Sources. Memoirs and Literary Works

The primary sources which I will work on in this thesis can be divided into three groups. Firstly, the telegraphic correspondence of the People's Council in the short-living

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary. The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd. 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Mark Cornwall (ed.), *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary. Essays in Political and Military History*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990).

State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs,<sup>22</sup> published by Bogdan Krizman,<sup>23</sup> will serve to explain the nature of the Zeleni kadar and upheaval in Croatia and Slavonia in the second chapter. The critical distancing from the accounts which the People's Council officials provided in these reports, will emerge as some general remarks, apparent in secondary sources, are evaluated and compared with this body of material. As we will see, some apparently strong arguments within the contemporary historiographic discourse will be questioned, and a clearer image of the Zeleni kadar will emerge subsequently.

However, the third chapter will deal with other two types of sources, which will require a more thorough understanding of the nature of sources and a more elaborate methodological approach. These are the memoirs of those men who participated in the conflict and the literary representations emerging in the interwar period, which bear the imprint of the experience of the war. In both of these cases a basic understanding of literary criticism should be achieved in order to use these works as historical sources. Furthermore, a problematic concept of memory and the issues concerning its creation will also be addressed in this chapter, since a sound methodological basis for interpretation of these sources would be vague without this element.

The autobiographic accounts of the authors of memoirs I intend to research, should be viewed as stemming from both the actual events experienced, as the basis of those narratives, and the aesthetic (genre conventions) or ethic (social norms) reasons which conditioned the manner in which the authors conveyed their experiences to the audience.<sup>24</sup> In other words,

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<sup>22</sup> The transitional government of the People's Council lasted from 29<sup>th</sup> of October to 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918, when the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was joined with the Kingdom of Serbia to make the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the Karađorđević dynasty. For a detailed political context and major actors of these events see: Ljubomir Antić, "Prvi Svjetski rat i Hrvati" (The First World War and the Croats), *Hrvatska revija*, vol. 2 (2004), pp. 15 – 21.

<sup>23</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Građa o nemirima u Hrvatskoj na kraju g. 1918" (The Source Material on Upheaval in Croatia in the End of 1918), *Historijski zbornik*, no. 1 – 4 (1957), pp. 111 – 129.

<sup>24</sup> See: Filip Hameršak, *Tamna strana Marsa*, p. 100.

cultural, political and social context in which the author of the memoir or literary work lived in and produced his written account of the war, should always be considered because of its role in shaping the authors' perception for relevant and irrelevant or acceptable and unacceptable. This means that certain situations, although previously experienced by the author, intentionally disappeared in his later account, either because of his own scruples, the audience's expectations or censorship. Therefore, the relevance of this connection between the socially acceptable behaviour and personal recollections, when dealing with literary representations of the past, will become obvious as the discrepancies between various accounts concerning the same events become apparent.

Bearing this in mind, in the context of the new state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia subsequently, the participation in the First World War in the k. u. k. army was *a priori* looked upon with suspicion or contempt.<sup>25</sup> Hameršak noted that such attitudes resulted with clear anti-Habsburg features in the autobiographic literature in the 1920's, which were replaced with an apolitical tone in the 1930's.<sup>26</sup> The political and social understanding of the Austria-Hungary, the war period and its legacy, here left a strong imprint on the autobiographic accounts of Croatian veterans. This is particularly obvious in the cases where the memoirs deal with the Bolshevik ideology, which was in the interwar period stigmatized throughout the successor states. This negative attitude towards the communists in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, resulted with strong aversive tone towards revolutionary influences penetrating some spheres of society at the end of the war.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Mladen Klemenčić, "Hrvati i europski bog Mars" (Croats and the European God Mars), *Hrvatska revija*, vol. 2 (2004), p. 13 – 14.

<sup>26</sup> Filip Hameršak, "Veliki rat 'odozdo' u hrvatskim autobiografijama" (The Great War from 'Below' in Croatian Autobiographies), *Hrvatska revija*, vol. 3 (2014), p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> The anti-Bolshevik attitude is particularly present in the memoirs published in the 1930's and early 1940's, when the Communist Party in Yugoslavia was illegal. These memoirs will be presented in chapter 3.

These observations lead us to another point, where we should address the issue of utilizing memoirs and literary works as historical sources. Although always desirable, research based on various types of sources is particularly necessary when we deal with literary representations of the past, and those accounts should always be supplemented with other textual documents.<sup>28</sup> In order to grasp them in a methodologically sound way, as historians, we should not only conceive this dependence of the memoirs and literary works on less ‘fictional’ body of sources, but also understand the notions of fiction and memory.

In his book, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell argued that the memoir is a sort of fiction which contains the author’s continuous claims to the veracity of his narrative and appeals to documented historical facts.<sup>29</sup> For the purpose of my argument, the idea that the essence of memoirs (and literary representations even more) is defined by their fictitious character cannot present a profound obstacle. Without the need to enter deeper issues of the social science *per se*, here it will suffice to say that not only these genres, but the language itself, aims to refer to non-textual reality,<sup>30</sup> and in that sense necessarily contains fiction. However, the claims to veracity in the autobiographic literature, certainly make it a discourse similar to historiography. In this view, the witnesses of the Great War, who provided their accounts in the form of various literary genres, should be considered as interpreters of past events. Considering previous remarks on the social, political and cultural conditions which shaped one’s narrative on his past experience, these authors shared common features of memory-making with the environment they lived in.

Dramatic and unique experience, such as World War I and the upheaval in the hinterland of the Austria-Hungary definitely were for the contemporaries, leaves dense

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<sup>28</sup> Mark H. Gelber, “Autobiography and History: Stefan Zweig, Theodor Herzl and *Die Welt von Gestern*“, *Leo Beck Institute Year Book*, vol. 57 (2012), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 312.

<sup>30</sup> Filip Hameršak, *Hrvatski bog Mars*, p. 114 – 115.

individual and collective memory traces.<sup>31</sup> The importance of managing this memory and establishing social truths about the past rendered the experience of the First World War susceptible to political agenda of channelling the understanding of the past towards universal truths. After the breakup of the Austria-Hungary, the situation in the successor states demanded a formulation of the basis on which the new regime could claim its legitimacy. In this situation, the struggle of various actors to secure their interpretation of the past and impose it as a dominant view transformed the memory into an ideological battlefield.<sup>32</sup> Pointing back to the factors which conditioned an individual's creation of his narrative, this situation rendered the author's individual experience unimportant, unless it supported someone's ideological view on the past. Samuel Hynes argues that this sort of memory-making is actually typical; in his view, the war memoirs are the most efficient in providing the fabric for collective myths, but the personal details and individual perception becomes less important if it lacks concurrence with the general view on the past.<sup>33</sup> The importance of these observations lies in the connection of individual narratives and literary representations, which I will present in this thesis as source material prone to methodological analysis, with the environment their authors lived in.

The relevance of these accounts for our understanding of the topic at hand lies in the fact that the archival material on the phenomenon of Zeleni kadar and the upheaval at the end of 1918 is generally inaccessible or destroyed to a considerable degree.<sup>34</sup> Apart from this inconvenient circumstance, the literary experiences and individual accounts reflect the

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<sup>31</sup> Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework", in: Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Nebojša Petrović, "Kolektivna sećanja i perspektive poslekonfliktne modernizacije" (Collective memories and Prospects for Post-conflict Modernisation), in: Tihomir Cipek, Olivera Milosavljević, 1918. *Kultura sjećanja. Povijesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti* (1918. The Culture of Remembrance. Historic Fractures and Overcoming of the Past), (Zagreb: Disput, 2007), p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Hynes, "Personal Narratives and Commemoration", in: Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 207 – 208.

<sup>34</sup> Filip Hameršak, "Veliki rat 'odozdo'", p. 14.



atmosphere of a historical period and its characteristics, which provides us with a new perspective, particularly in the sphere of social attitudes and behaviour.<sup>35</sup> The memoirs and literary works dealing with the reality of the First World War for these two reasons present an important aspect of my research. However, as I have already mentioned, these should not be considered without documentation of a more official character. Therefore, the body of sources mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the telegraphic correspondence of the People's Council, will be used in comparison with the historiographic attainments on this topic, and provide us with a context in which the authors of the memoirs and literature on the Great War attained their wartime experience.

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<sup>35</sup> Werner T. Angress, "The Interplay of History and Literature: An Essay", vol. 71 (Winter, 1979), p. 410.

## 2. WHO WERE THE *ZELNI KADAR*?

The chaos which ensued at the end of the First World War throughout the Austro-Hungarian lands was a symptom of a decaying regime in a country worn out by war, terrible social conditions and political crisis. In the late months of 1918, the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia, as part of the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen, was a scene of pillaging, violence and general turmoil. The main actor was the *Zeleni kadar*, consisting of armed men still wearing the k. u. k. army uniform and crowds of peasants, all of them angry with their miserable living conditions, full of contempt for the well-situated officials and landed gentry, and fed up with ‘someone else’s’ war.

These claims, along with the questions that emerge with them, will be addressed in this chapter. It seems obvious that a short and simple narrative, as shown above, cannot present an attempt to explain the events that took place in the South-Slavic regions of the Habsburg Empire at the time of its breakup, or give insight into the nature of *Zeleni kadar* and its legacy. However, any final observations about the phenomenon of desertion and revolt at the end of the Great War will only emerge as a deeper insight into the general attitude of Croatian soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army, their morale, the variety of reasons for avoiding military service, and their activities once they had returned to their homeland as deserters. Therefore, in this chapter I aim to describe the general atmosphere in Croatia and Slavonia in the late months of 1918, explain the decay of the central authorities and describe the forms of violence and upheaval caused by the *Zeleni kadar*.

## 2. 1. The Soldiers: Numbers, Discontent and Disorder

The Austro-Hungarian army hierarchy and ranking presented one of the most complex military systems in the world and in many ways mirrored the mosaic of nationalities within the country itself. The proportion of nationalities had the same effect; the Germans and Hungarians made up to 48% of the soldiers, while all the other nations, predominantly Slavs, filled the rest.<sup>36</sup> The last major military reform before the outbreak of the World War I, following the Compromise of 1867, introduced the separate corps of both the Austrian and Hungarian Home Guard, the latter named Honvéd, besides the common k. u. k. army. The Croatian troops were incorporated in both branches of the military, but had a distinctive position within the Home Guard, comprised of purely Croat-speaking officers who wore Croatian national colours.<sup>37</sup> The largest number of Croatian soldiers served in the 7<sup>th</sup> Osijek, 36<sup>th</sup> Zagreb k. u. k. Divisions and in 42<sup>nd</sup> Honvéd Infantry Division, which was during the 1918 situated on the Italian front.<sup>38</sup> By this time they had all participated in offensives in Serbia and on the Galician front; as Ivo Banac estimates, around 200, 000 South-Slavic soldiers had fallen to Russian captivity in Galicia,<sup>39</sup> and many turned to Serbs before that, forming a Yugoslav volunteer corps.<sup>40</sup> In total, around one million people from the South-Slavic lands of the Habsburg Empire were mobilised, and almost 190, 000 never returned to their homes.<sup>41</sup> By the end of the war another category was taking its toll on the army's manpower: the deserters in the *Zeleni kadar*.

The phrase *Zeleni kadar* (or sometimes *kader*), which could literally be translated as the *Green Cadre*, was attributed to a variety of armed groups committing robberies, avoiding

<sup>36</sup> Filip Novosel, "Hrvatsko-Slavonske postrojbe", *Scrinia Slavonica*, vol 10 (2010), p. 276.

<sup>37</sup> See: Filip Novosel, "Hrvatsko-Slavonske postrojbe", pp. 279 – 280.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary*, p. 287.

<sup>39</sup> Ivo Banac, "South Slav Prisoners of War in Revolutionary Russia", in: Peter Pastor and Samuel R. Williamson Jr, (eds.). *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Vol. 5, (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983) , p. 120.

<sup>40</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question, in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, and Politics*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 121 – 122.

<sup>41</sup> Filip Novosel, „Hrvatsko-Slavonske postrojbe“, p. 288.

re-recruitment and generally acting against the state authorities in Croatian lands in the second half of 1918. It would seem that the term *kadar* itself was of a military nature, describing the corpus of the regular army acting in the rear, as logistic support and consisting of reserves, non-active officers and administrative officials. Frane Dubravčić, a World War I veteran from the town of Otočac in central Croatia, refers to these background military forces simply as *kader*.<sup>42</sup> The issue of regular army leaves, which I will address more thoroughly later on, is in Dubravčić's memoir often given importance, and in this context the image of the easy life in the *kadar* service emerges. Before his last official leave home in the spring of 1918, he recalls speaking to his comrades:

- Farewell, boys, the front will not see me again!
- You said that more than once, but you always came back!
- I'm telling you: this is the last time we meet at the front. I'd rather meet you in the *kader*!
- Goodbye 'till the *kader* then!<sup>43</sup>

As seen in Dubravčić's recollection, the term *kadar* was in everyday use among the Croat soldiers, and was subsequently accepted by most of the local population. The other part of the phrase, namely the green colour, was attributed through its connotations to forests and wilderness occupied by the deserters and other renegades, and by the midsummer of 1918, the words *Zeleni kadar* were widespread.<sup>44</sup>

Regardless of the name they were attributed, the desertions began to present a serious issue already in 1917. A report submitted to the government in Zagreb in January 1918, stated that in the previous year 20, 000 military runaways had been caught after committing various atrocities.<sup>45</sup> In the personal account of general Samuel Freiherr von Hazai, at that point the

<sup>42</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je. Uspomene iz Prvoga svjetskog rata 1914 - 1918* (I am Alive and I am Well. Memories from the First World War 1914 - 1918), (Rijeka, Otočac: Grafrade, Katedra Čakavskog sabora pokrajine Gacke, 2002), pp. 63, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Ivo Banac, "I Karlo je o'šo u komite: Nemiri u Hrvatskoj u jesen 1918" (Even Charles had gone to Deserters: The Uprising in Croatia in the Autumn of 1918), *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol 3 (1992), p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", p. 595.

minister of defence, it is estimated that there were around 27, 000 deserters as early as August of 1918, only in Croatian lands.<sup>46</sup> The period of Austro-Hungarian administration was, as we will see, faced with a somewhat more concrete form of *Zeleni kadar* than that emerging in the later months of that year, and could offer a better estimation of an actual number of armed men causing disorder in the hinterland.

The figure of 200, 000 deserters from the k. u. k. and Honvéd ranks alike, who operated throughout the Monarchy,<sup>47</sup> has to be taken with caution, not only because the authors usually add that this number cannot be affirmed with certainty. By the time the *Zeleni kadar* took hold of the wide areas of the Monarchy in the autumn of 1918, it presented a mixture of deserting soldiers, masses of peasants and groups of opportunistic criminals. The breakup of the Austro-Hungarian administration and the instalment of the new and unstable offices in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, contributed to the general lack of information about the movements in the countryside, which results in complete uncertainty about the scale of the *Zeleni kadar*. A closer examination by Ivo Banac only pointed to partial results, confined to smaller areas of Croatia and Slavonia: 8, 000 men at Petrova Gora close to the Bosnian border, and 6, 000 at Fruška Gora in eastern Slavonia.<sup>48</sup> The final estimation of the number of men in the *Zeleni kadar* apparently cannot be given. Based on colonel Posavec's account, himself a witness of the period's calamities, 45, 000 soldiers fled only from the reservists' core. A number of fifty to sixty thousand men for Croatia and Slavonia would currently seem plausible; to conclude with Posavec's own words which further point to the vagueness of the

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<sup>46</sup> Dinko Čutura, *Hrvatske postrojbe u Prvom svjetskom ratu i vojni raspad Austro-Ugarske*, (Croatian troops in the First World War and Military Breakup of Austria-Hungary), MA thesis, (Zagreb: University of Zagreb), p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> This estimation was made by Ferdo Čulinović, *Odjeci Oktobra*, p. 97, and is very often referred to in other works. See: Dinko Čutura, Lovro Galić: "Veliki rat: pregled ratnih operacija" (The Great War: an Overview of Military Operations), *Hrvatska revija*, vol. 3 (2004), p. 52; Željko Martan, „Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'“, p. 597.

<sup>48</sup> Ivo Banac, "I Karlo je o'šo", p. 24.

actual answer we seek: “How many lads fled the marching troops and the frontline, is impossible to say, but it must be a considerable number.”<sup>49</sup>

The general atmosphere and morale in the Austro-Hungarian military during the First World War are usually taken as the primary culprits when dealing with desertion, and although these had a role in soldiers’ choice to abandon the army or avoid service, at this point the motives of this ‘considerable number’ of deserters seem manifold. The sheer scale of the *Zeleni kadar* should itself help to enforce this statement, but a more thorough explanation of soldiers’ attitudes and concerns, along with the effects of general indigence and the popular feeling of deprivation and injustice in the war should be given to illuminate the driving force behind the masses that turned disobedient. Some of the most notable factors with which I will deal here, and which caused discontent among the South-Slavic peoples of the Monarchy, are the national issues, extended warfare, lack of enthusiasm and the failing mechanism of the State.

The political issues, mainly over national questions, which were since the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a regular subject of dispute in the Habsburg Empire, were given a new dimension in the war-exhausted Danubian Monarchy. Although often overemphasised, the national discourse played an important role in diminishing the will to fight for the Austro-Hungary and stirred the emotions between different nationalities. Here we should avoid the old-fashioned observations, treating the Monarchy as a dungeon of the nations. One such note opens an otherwise fascinating book by Edward Crankshaw: “Not many mourned the death of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918; far more rejoiced.”<sup>50</sup> The far more insightful statement about the national issues, which points to the problem at hand, is given later in the book, and speaks about the new reality of mass armies and nations becoming mass societies and taking

<sup>49</sup> Dinko Čutura, *Hrvatske postrojbe u Prvom*, p. 84.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House*, p. 3.

a life of their own.<sup>51</sup> Already in the years before the war, the dualistic system of the Monarchy, established in 1867, was challenged by discontent among the Slavic peoples. In the atmosphere of rising tensions, the South-Slavic question was seen as crucial in administering the national discontent throughout the Monarchy.<sup>52</sup> The political solutions for these questions were of limited importance at the moment of the breakup of the Empire, although the national discourse itself emphasised other forms of malcontent in 1918.

The Fourteen points, designed in the office of Woodrow Wilson, postulating the importance of national self-determination in post-war European politics, presented the strongest support for the aims of the ‘oppressed’ nationalities within the Habsburg Empire. However, even this project went only as far as federalising the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, rather than dissolving it completely, since the implication of the disappearance of such an international factor, was undesirable both politically and economically.<sup>53</sup> Although the fate of the Monarchy was all but clear by the late months of 1918, the discontent among the soldiers, based on national differences, caused fluctuations of morale and rendered some Slavic units particularly unreliable. The weight of these issues on the k. u. k. fighting spirit was additionally increased by the allied propaganda, which was successful in encouraging disobedience and desertion, particularly in the second half of 1918.<sup>54</sup>

The general lack of enthusiasm, emerging with the disillusionment about the quick and victorious war, was particularly devastating for the soldiers’ morale. Again, this was symptomatic for Czech, Polish, Croatian and Slovene attitudes, when the initial fervour in the months after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was replaced with bitterness of

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<sup>51</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House*, p. 405.

<sup>52</sup> On this topic see: Janko Pleterski, “The Southern Slav Question 1908 – 1918“, in: Mark Cornwall (ed.), *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary*, pp. 77 – 100, esp. 78 – 80.

<sup>53</sup> Magda Ádám, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Successor States, in the Versailles System and Central Europe“, in: Magda Ádám (ed.), *The Versailles System and Central Europe*, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004) p. 225.

<sup>54</sup> David Stevenson, *With Our Backs*, p. 304.

the front, and most of the soldiers grasped the pointlessness of the war. An illustrative example of two Czech regiments in Prague speaks of this attitude; with almost proverbial Czech irony, the troops marched towards the front holding banners with inscriptions: “We march against Russia, but we don’t know why!”<sup>55</sup> By the end of the war, any traces of war enthusiasm vanished and this had an irreparable effect on soldiers’ morale and readiness to fight.

A mixture of low morale and nationalistic resentment turned into a dangerous compound as the war inflicted serious damage on the Monarchy’s economy and caused material and food shortages. Although the war effort had put to the test all of the belligerents’ economies, the ensuing unrest over material conditions at the front, but in the hinterland as well, in Austria-Hungary turned into something more radical by the end of the war.<sup>56</sup> Generally speaking, hunger, exhaustion and widespread indigence led to mass discontent and, eventually, to desertion.<sup>57</sup> Vladko Maček was a lieutenant on the Italian front and made an account of conditions at the front in September and October of 1918. Apart from describing the poor conditions in which the soldiers had to live in, lack of clothing, firewood and other basic necessities, an episode regarding the soldiers’ refusal of food is here particularly indicative. Namely, Maček recollects that he had to persuade the soldiers to eat their food regardless of its quality and attempted to keep them calm, while they responded with curses and discontent: “One cannot wage war on this kind of food!”<sup>58</sup> The industrial and agricultural collapse of Austria-Hungary was taking its toll on the war machinery. The military authorities had to disband 300, 000 of the oldest k. u. k. soldiers in March of 1918, and the most important reason was the army’s incapability to feed its troops. On the other hand, later proposals to remobilise the soldiers released to the civilian economy were obstructed by the Hungarian

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<sup>55</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House*, p. 412.

<sup>56</sup> David Stevenson, *With Our Backs*, p. 303.

<sup>57</sup> Dinko Čutura, Lovro Galić, “Veliki rat: pregled“, p. 52.

<sup>58</sup> Vladko Maček, *Memoari* (Memoires), (Zagreb: Dom i Svijet, 2003), p. 65.



government, because the manpower was chronically lacking in that sector as well.<sup>59</sup> These conditions had a deteriorating effect on the soldiers' morale and the loosening of the sense of authority opened a way for avoiding military service and desertion.

As will appear obvious later in the next chapter, by the time the Austro-Hungarian high command signed the capitulation on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1918, the body of the army itself had already scattered, the bulk of its soldiers self-willingly leaving the front and aiming to return to their native lands.<sup>60</sup> During these late months of the last year of the war, the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia became overrun with soldiery mostly pledging allegiance to no higher authority, and due to the absence of former administrative authority, the new provisional government struggled to grasp the situation and establish order. The absence of forces of order on the ground, which the new People's Council of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs struggled to support with manpower and provisions, created a vacuum of authority in which the popular masses, merged with still armed soldiers, were given wide space to express their overgrown discontent.

At this point it will be necessary to give contours of the *Zeleni kadar* in terms of its participants and their activities. However, the secondary sources which I will use in this attempt to elucidate this phenomenon will only point to deep problems of defining the nature of the violence and upheaval at the end of 1918, while some clearer ideas on this issue should emerge in the last subchapter of this section.

The quantitatively greatest part of society in the lands which are here in focus were the peasantry. As a social category, peasants were predominantly marginalised in terms of economic significance and were materially pressured by the potency of nobility's agricultural

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<sup>59</sup> David Stevenson, *With Our Backs*, pp. 299 - 301.

<sup>60</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *Habsburška Monarhija 1809. - 1918.* (The Habsburg Monarchy 1809 – 1918), (Zagreb, 1990), p. 285.

production and the mechanisms of the industrial market.<sup>61</sup> Although the concrete issues of the agricultural reform fall outside the scope of this work, I will examine the attitudes towards the landed gentry and merchant class emerging from the feeling of economic deprivation. The sense of inequality was apparently emphasised during the war with most of the soldiers sent to bear the hardships of the trenches, charges over the no-man's land and facing the enemy's shellfire, coming from peasant families, while the members of nobility mostly experienced only background service and their families were not as exposed to economic crisis caused by the war.<sup>62</sup> The *Zeleni kadar*, at this moment consisting of deserters, returnees from Russian captivity and the land working strata of society was therefore composed predominantly of peasantry.

In this constellation, the deserters, still carrying their military equipment, were usually supported by their native environment and created a particularly resilient form of resistance, which the weak local authorities were unable to tackle with. Before the breakup of the Austria-Hungary, however, the local administration, predominantly consisting of the members of the Croatian-Serb coalition, worked on undermining of the attempts to eradicate the *Zeleni kadar*. Once the headquarters in Zagreb asked for information on ground, the responses from local units were usually late, withheld information and hushed up the data.<sup>63</sup> The fact that the upheaval in the countryside did not cease, but actually intensified, at the point in which the political situation changed, and the government's position in Zagreb coincided with political orientation of the local officials, contributes to the argument that the *Zeleni kadar* was not a

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<sup>61</sup> Although a comprehensive work on the questions of peasantry on the beginning of the twentieth century Croatia and Slavonia is still missing, some information is given in: Mira Kolar, "Privredni i socijalni razlozi propasti Države Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba" (Economic and Social Reasons for the Breakdown of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs), in: Zlatko Matijević (ed.), *Godina 1918* (The Year 1918), pp. 171 – 194; Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Agrarna reforma u Hrvatskoj nakon Prvoga svjetskog rata", *Hrvatska revija*, vol. 3 (2014) pp. 44 -50; Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", pp. 593 – 633. These also touch upon the matter only marginally.

<sup>62</sup> Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Agrarna reforma u Hrvatskoj", p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> Dinko Čutura, *Hrvatske postrojbe*, p. 106.

channelled movement against the Austro-Hungarian political framework, but rather a phenomenon of mass discontent and anarchy.

This argument points to further difficulties in explaining the Zeleni kadar in terms of its numbers and characteristics. A particularly intriguing trope of returning soldiers farming their lands and taking care of their households with guns on their shoulders, is considered very illustrative of the situation on ground by some historians.<sup>64</sup> This shows that the attitude of distrust and anger towards the state apparatus was shared by deserters, returning soldiers and the rest of rural population. Considering the support which the armed men had in their local communities, which provided them with shelter and information, it would be reasonable to assume that the activities aiming to suppress the Zeleni kadar by the state authorities were destined to fail.

In order to move away from talking of the Zeleni kadar through a vaguely described mixture of returning soldiers, deserters and peasants, we should consider Tomislav Bogdanović's attempt to actually categorize groups of people participating in its activities.<sup>65</sup> He proposes four distinct categories which are as follows: 1) anti-war movement, refusing to further participate in military activities; mostly deserters; 2) social-revolutionary character, with influences of Bolshevik revolution, fomented by former Russian prisoners of war; 3) brigands and robbers, exploiting the chaotic situation in which they could operate; and 4) returnees from the front, aiming to reach their homes as quickly as possible, but faced with difficulties (lack of provisions and transportation) turn to pillaging the countryside.<sup>66</sup> Although this categorization is noteworthy, it neglects some important features of the Zeleni kadar. Firstly, the role of rural population, which provided the environment for the upheaval

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<sup>64</sup> Ivo Banac, "I Karlo je o'šo", p. 23; Tomislav Bogdanović, "Kategorije Zelenog kadra", p. 97; Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", p. 598.

<sup>65</sup> Tomislav Bogdanović, "Kategorije Zelenog kadra", pp. 96 – 108.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

and contributed in both provisions and manpower, is left out. The second point, which I find more important for this topic, is that individuals who participated in all sorts of activities in the Zeleni kadar are wrongly assumed to have had a fixed position in these events. In other words, it is unreasonable to expect that a single person necessarily stayed a deserter, a revolutionary, or a peaceful peasant throughout the whole period. Furthermore, the first three categories actually point to the motives and ideals the individuals in the Zeleni kadar might have harboured, not various groups of people; we can imagine a returning soldier to be a Bolshevik and an anti-war idealist at the same time, or a returning Russian prisoner of war turning to crime for some other reasons.

Therefore, a historiographic attempt to categorize active groups in a phenomenon such as Zeleni kadar, at this point seems unrewarding. We have to note that the contemporary government bodies were faced with a similar methodological problem: the general lack of means of obtaining information for the administrative bodies in both Austria-Hungary in the final months of the war, and subsequently in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, meant that explaining the nature of the upheaval was prone to a wide variety of interpretations. This uncertainty in defining the Zeleni kadar will be dealt with in the following two sections.

## **2. 2. Further Interpretations: Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks**

The October Revolution of 1917 marked the end of the World War I on the Eastern front, transformed the Russian society and established a social system which found its appeal among many who saw themselves as deprived and oppressed, and as those who would in future remedy the injustice of the past times. This sort of attitude found its appeal among

many Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war, who by the time the Russian Empire collapsed started to return to their homes. This section will deal with the influence these returnees had on the forming of the Zeleni kadar and will aim to distinguish the real weight of Bolshevik ideas among the Croatian and Slavonian population, which is the focal point of a good part of historiography.

As we have seen, as the war prolonged, the k. u. k. high command struggled to sustain its manpower, and the flood of returning prisoners of war from Russia could have served to fill up its ranks. However, the concern of revolutionary ideas already taking root in these men, forced the military authorities to see them as unreliable and question their eventual effectiveness once they would return to the front. Apart from the fact that many of these soldiers decided to avoid military service and join the Zeleni kadar, those who were reintroduced to the army apparatus were subjugated to questioning and censorship, and the army command reluctantly sent them back to the frontlines where they could communicate with the rest of the soldiers.<sup>67</sup> The trope of Bolshevik ideas taking root among both the soldiery and peasantry in the hinterland emerges in memoir literature, but the relevance of those accounts will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Here it will be necessary to grasp the influence of the Yugoslav historiography, particularly in the 1950's, which emphasised the relevance of those prisoners of war introducing revolutionary ideas to Zeleni kadar, and shaped the image of the upheaval at the end of 1918 attributing Bolshevik characteristics to its protagonists. Although the work of this historiography is highly disputable, no real effort has been made to properly evaluate this

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<sup>67</sup> Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", p. 595.

aspect of our topic, or even to assess the legacy of Marxist academics on contemporary historiography.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, a short digression on this issue will be presented here.

A deeper insight into the methodological question of Marxist historiography falls out of the scope of this chapter, but for the needs of this discussion, I will point to some aspects which outline the character of these works. With the focus on the case of Soviet historiography, some western scholars have pointed out that in the period after World War II, Russian academics created a historiographic discourse which sacralised the October revolution.<sup>69</sup> Analogously, the events in Croatia and Slavonia at the end of the 1918 and the whole Zeleni kadar movement were seen by the historians of socialist Yugoslavia as a form of revolution with obvious tendencies to form a communist state.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, common Marxist tropes of class struggle, exploitation and oppressed masses – to name just a few – very much formed the guiding principle in these works and clearly aimed to present the Zeleni kadar as a progressive step in the historic development towards a communist society. For instance, Konstantin Bastalić wrote:

It was already well – known that the Zeleni kadar was mostly composed of poor peasantry and city's pauperism (...) Zeleni kadar especially grew as ex – prisoners started to return from Russia, which implemented the ideas of the October Revolution to the Zeleni kadar. These returnees, therefore, revolutionised the masses of the Zeleni kadar in the direction of active struggle against the system and the exploitation of war profiteers and the representatives of non-national government.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> An attempt to evaluate these trends in 1950's Yugoslavia has been made, but only in spheres of art. See: Zlata Knezović, "Boljševizacija i ideologizacija hrvatske kulture i umjetnosti (1948.)" (Bolshevization and ideological transformation of the Croatian culture and arts in 1948, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 26 (1994), pp. 47 – 63. The author here claims that the classification of 'advanced' socialist art and culture is strongly opposed to capitalist 'backwardness' in the period of 1950's in Yugoslavia, p. 58.

<sup>69</sup> See: Teddy J. Ulders, "Windows on the Russian Past: Essays on Soviet Historiography since Stalin by Samuel H. Baron; Nancy W. Heer", *The History Teacher*, vol. 11 (May 1978), esp. p. 453; Eduard Thaden, "Marxist Historicism and the Crises of Soviet Historiography", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 51 (2003), p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> This discourse especially developed in the already mentioned works of these authors; see: Konstantin Bastalić, "Stvaranje stare Jugoslavije", in: Ivan Kampuš (ed.) *Narodi Jugoslavije u borbi za slobodu*; Ferdo Čulinović, *Odjeci Oktobra*; Ferdo Čulinović, "Zeleni Kadar", pp. 124 – 142. Bogdan Krizman, "O odjecima Oktobarske revolucije", pp. 149 – 157.

<sup>71</sup> Konstantin Bastalić, "Stvaranje stare Jugoslavije", 106.

Apart from the lack of time frame and even basic reference to the author's primary sources in this text, we are clearly presented with a one-sided narrative, where the aim is to imbed the inarticulate and violent burst of discontent into a pattern of revolutionary struggle. Similarly, Bogdan Krizman argued that the disorder throughout the countryside of Croatia and Slavonia intensified with the disappearance of Austria-Hungary, and the peasantry, now free of the 'oppressing' regime, initiated a decisive payoff with the 'exploiting' elements in the rural areas.<sup>72</sup> This argumentation is far from giving a thorough insight into a complex phenomenon which the Zeleni kadar definitely was, since the narrative here implies that the violence ensuing after the disappearance of the regime, was directed at the same structures that just crumbled, which is self-explanatory.

The work of the Yugoslav academic community in the 1950's would not present a serious obstacle to our understanding of the topic at hand, were it not for the occasional and uncritical consultation with these works in contemporary Croatian historiography. Unfortunately, even the most comprehensive work of international character, an article by John Paul Newman,<sup>73</sup> occasionally consults this part of the literature while giving concrete statements about the nature of the Zeleni kadar. Newman claims that the socialist ideas were definitely present among the South Slavs, primarily Croatian intellectuals and soldiers, and states that the returnees from the Russian captivity were fatal to the authority of the Austro-Hungarian regime. However, this is supported with reference to the outdated academic work from the Yugoslav socialist period, which unfortunately shows a lack of critical distancing from this body of literature.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "O odjecima Oktobarske revolucije", p. 150.

<sup>73</sup> John Paul Newman, "Post-imperial and Post-war Violence", pp. 249 – 265.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 252. Especially see footnote 9.

The issue of the legacy of the socialist academic circles has not yet been properly addressed. However, some exceptions in dealing with the impact of the Bolshevik ideas on the Zeleni kadar do exist, primarily in the works of Ivo Banac and Željko Martan. In an attempt to diminish the relevance of the carriers of revolutionary ideology among the Zeleni kadar, Banac stated that the members of the contemporary official Communist party in Croatia distanced themselves from their activities and the Zeleni kadar as a whole.<sup>75</sup> Although this line of argumentation does not prove the non-existence of Bolshevik influences among the participants of the upheaval in the autumn of 1918, it does point to a lack of communication between the communists themselves, and diminishes the possibility of an organized revolutionary movement. On the other hand, in his work Martan grasped possibly the whole body of available literature here discussed, but approached it with criticism, and choosing to point to the targets of the Zeleni kadar, rather than emphasising their alleged revolutionary character.<sup>76</sup> The irony embedded in the title of his article, the ‘rotten’ peasantry and the ‘exploiting’ gentry, is illustrative of his understanding of the subject and critical distance when dealing with such terminology.

It would seem that the basis of the socialist period historiographers’ idea of Bolshevism taking its roots in the Zeleni kadar and setting its course, lies in the fact that the referential sources actually contains frequent references to the term ‘revolution’ in general. However, it is important to understand the content of the term itself in the context of the Austro-Hungarian breakup, and its meaning for contemporaries. While the examples of this relativity of the term itself will emerge later through introduction of source material, here I will present a case where the ‘revolution’ and ‘revolutionary’ obviously contain different

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<sup>75</sup> Ivo Banac, *The Effects of World War I: The Class War After the Great War; The Rise of Communist Parties in East Central Europe, 1918-1921*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 191.

<sup>76</sup> Željko Martan, “Ustanak ‘pokvarenih elemenata’“, especially pp. 594 – 596, where the author points to general attitude towards the regime and authority, regarding the Bolshevik influence as only one of many factors in Zeleni kadar’s formation.



meanings for various groups of people. In the shooting that took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 at the main Zagreb square, which was a result of discontent that was spreading among some groups of former Austro-Hungarian soldiers because of their unresolved status, and Serbian troops aiming to repel the gathering mob from the square, an order was issued from the headquarters of the Serbian army: “Even at the cost of your lives, you have to suppress the revolutionary movement of Austro-Hungarian companies!”<sup>77</sup> In this military correspondence, the Croat troops protesting at the ban Jelačić square were given revolutionary marks, while those soldiers actually did not participate in activities of the Zeleni kadar; in other words, this body of military could actually be called reactionary, considering their claims for similar status that they enjoyed in Austria-Hungary.

Yet another form of meaning was added to the term ‘revolutionary’ ten years later, when the men shot down<sup>78</sup> on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, were celebrated in an illegal leaflet as ‘heroic Croatian revolutionaries’.<sup>79</sup> Here the growing animosities between the Serbs and Croats in the new State transformed those soldiers into patriots dying for their homeland, and assimilation of the term ‘revolutionaries’ into a nationalistic discourse. The obvious problem a historiographic research has to deal with here is the ambiguity of the term ‘revolution’ in contemporary sources. In a way, the issue is similar to that of officials’ attempts to estimate the numbers of the Zeleni kadar; the misunderstanding of the situation they had to tackle with, leaves us with a variety of assessments of the scale of the Zeleni kadar, but also with different interpretations of the revolutionary impact on the phenomenon as well.

What should be apparent at this point is that the legacy of socialist historiography, which overemphasised the role of Bolshevik influences, because of its uncritical use of source

<sup>77</sup> Stjepan Matković, “Istraživačke dopune o pobuni 5. prosinca 1918 godine“ (Additional Research on the Rebellion of the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1918), in: Zlatko Matijević (ed.) *Godina 1918*, p. 141.

<sup>78</sup> Latest research shows that 18 men were killed, while the first official reports stated there were 13 killed, of whom there were 9 soldiers. Stjepan Matković, “Istraživačke dopune“, p. 124.

<sup>79</sup> Stjepan Matković, “Istraživačke dopune“, p. 145.

material, created an image of Zeleni kadar as bearing strong characteristics of a revolutionary movement. Although I try to argue against this premise, the obvious fact is that Bolshevism was present in Croatian lands, primarily through the agency of former Russian prisoners of war. Even three peasant republics and one allegedly Bolshevik commune existed in November of 1918,<sup>80</sup> but they were of short life span and small scale, which suggests that the Russian revolutionary ideas had little effect on the attitudes of people involved in the Zeleni kadar activities. Furthermore, the primary motive for soldiers was avoiding a return to the front, while the violence directed towards the regime was a manifestation of the characteristic animosity of the peasantry towards the gentry and state apparatus, embedded in the *ancien régime*.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, it seems that various emotions, motives and attitudes which took violent form at the end of 1918, can hardly be explained only through adherence to Bolshevik ideas. As we will see in subsequent chapters, source material only enforces the perplexity of peasant attitudes towards authority, the motives of the soldiers fed-up with war and the influences of the revolutionary movement in Russia. Finally, this digression shows the importance of consulting source material, which is the basis of the following subchapter.

### **2. 3. Authorities and the Zeleni kadar: the Climax in the late Months of 1918**

Austria-Hungary was even before its breakup unable to continue to wage the war on the front, and in a situation of administrative collapse, and the strong resistance in the

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<sup>80</sup> Ivo Banac, "I Karlo je o'šo", p. 39.

<sup>81</sup> Even though Newman attaches high importance to Bolshevik influences in the Zeleni kadar, his later remarks are less one-sided, see: John Paul Newman, "Post-imperial and Post-war Violence", p. 254 - 255.

hinterland only accelerated its demise.<sup>82</sup> With the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian authority in the later days of October 1918, this resistance of deserting soldiers and discontented population, particularly in the countryside, transformed into a violent and widespread outburst of anger. Therefore, the peak of Zeleni kadar's activities occurred in November of 1918,<sup>83</sup> as the new government of the People's Council attempted to establish administrative authority throughout the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.

The telegraphic correspondence of new officials trying to take control of the situation and notify the Department of People's Defence in Zagreb of the upheaval in the countryside, contains information on Zeleni kadar's activities, particularly in the former Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia. This body of sources was published by Bogdan Krizman, and he submitted it to his own critical method, which resulted in emphasis on "those [messages] which, in our opinion, contain – more or less – some elements characteristic for the situation."<sup>84</sup> The methodological approach to this correspondence should take into account previous observations, namely, the incapability of the local authorities to grasp the situation, and the provisory remarks they had to make. Furthermore, the officials' personal convictions and state of mind, which will become apparent in some cases, should also serve to distance ourselves from blindly reproducing the material at hand; as Krizman notes himself: "obviously the whole source material represents the events unilaterally and incompletely, and it will be necessary ... to subjugate it to critical evaluation."<sup>85</sup> However, as I mentioned before, the targets of the Zeleni kadar and forms of upheaval in this period, present in these relatively short messages, should come into the foreground through this approach, which should help us grasp the phenomenon from another angle.

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<sup>82</sup> David Stevenson, *With our Backs*, p. 532.

<sup>83</sup> Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", p. 593.

<sup>84</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Grada o nemirima", p. 111.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

A few motives constantly emerged in these telegraphic messages throughout November, which point to the nature of upheaval and the difficulties the officials had to overcome. Firstly, the lack of manpower and ammunition in the local garrisons proved to be a fundamental issue for the authorities aiming to restore order in the land. Many calls for troops and ammunition vaguely describe the situation in the local communities, giving no reference to numbers of men or weapons needed to defend against the Zeleni kadar. However, it is possible to get the sense of incapacity of the new forces of order, the Peoples Guard, to handle the problem of rebellious people. For instance, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October the mayor of Požega county informs how the Peoples Guard had been established in some towns, but they lacked rifles, in Požega itself for instance, “although the Peoples Guard counts 300 men, it has guns and ammunition to equip barely half.”<sup>86</sup> On the same day the mayor of Daruvar asked “urgently for 600 men and two machine guns, because the whole area is threatened by the Zeleni kadar.” Further east in Slavonia, in Brod, one official stated that “the most horrible anarchy ensued. To secure life, please send an armoured train with 500 men.”<sup>87</sup> These calls for help are by no means lonely in this sequence of reports, but most of them ask for under a hundred men, and become less frequent as November passed. However, they indicate that the issue of uprising was not confined to just a few areas, but was widespread throughout the country.

Furthermore, the reliability of the new officials and the Peoples Guard left a lot to be desired. The officials, usually without protection, and exposed to the good will of the armed groups of men, are frequently reported to leave their posts, primarily in rural areas. However, the primary issue was the readiness of the forces of order, which lacked discipline and motivation. In some cases the Peoples Guard, having no means to counter the anarchy, simply

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<sup>86</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, pp. 113 - 114.

ran from their positions, while on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, the garrisons in Vuka, Podgorač and Đakovo were even trapped in their stations under the Zeleni kadar.<sup>88</sup> In one report, the lack of basic necessities for the Peoples Guard, indicates the fragility of the new State's authority: "Yesterday 400 men were put at the disposal of the People's Council committee, but the committee could not keep them in Brod because of the lack of food and lodgings, (...) They have scattered throughout the Slavonian villages, and will forcefully join the military refugees."<sup>89</sup> The fear, of the possibility that the men supposed to keep the order might join the Zeleni kadar, which the author of this report expressed, actually points to the nature of the upheaval, with no clearly defined political or social characteristics.

It would be hard to determine to what degree these reports reflect individual official's fear, which might have resulted in overemphasis of the peril and the actual manpower needed to keep order. However, the safety of private and public property alike, was under real threat, and we get such an impression from reports informing the headquarters in Zagreb of the Zeleni kadar's strength in numbers and equipment. The difficulties of estimating the scale of uprisings for the local officials become apparent when they fail to give certain numbers, or to discern the actions of deserters from the peasant violence. More than once, the reference to the actual manpower is simply expressed through the term 'masses'; a characteristic report states: "The frenzy of mass pillages of private property. (...) Offices cease working. Lives in danger."<sup>90</sup> In the case the numbers are indicated, they actually fail to give any clear information of what is the nature of the upheaval. For instance, in one report from northern Croatia, dated 10<sup>th</sup> of November, the official claims that "300 men attacked Ludbreg last Sunday, but were repelled by the local guards."<sup>91</sup> In this case it is hard to determine who these

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<sup>88</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Građa o nemirima", p. 115.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

men were; for a small sized village, such as Ludbreg was, it would be hard to expect that a few guardsmen fought off a group of 300, so we should think that it was a highly disorganised mob of peasants, and, in this case again, numbers are not very indicative. The basis of the problem lies in the incapability to make a clear cut between categories of men in the Zeleni kadar. A report from central Croatia is here illustrative: “forests around Dubrava are infested with vagabonds, who are supported by the local population. There is around 180 vagabonds.”<sup>92</sup> Being the only report in this body of telegraphic correspondence, which gives a number of ‘non-peasant’ pillagers and distinguishes them from the ‘masses’, points to the difficulties of estimating the numbers of the Zeleni kadar.

Another aspect which is indicative for the power of peasants in revolt and soldiers is the ease with which they acquired military equipment and took possession of army provisions. Even before the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy disappeared, the issue of deserters acting against authority in the hinterland went hand in hand with their capability to arm themselves. By mid 1918, the Austro-Hungarian high command supplied the recruits with weapons only after they reached their units at the front, because of the fear they might mutiny while being transported by trains, or simply joining the deserters in the countryside.<sup>93</sup> The situation escalated rapidly, and by November not only the soldiers wielded weapons, but the reports of armed peasantry became frequent. Apart from general information about the gangs of armed peasants, one report claims that “the peasants have around thirty machine guns, with which they threaten the town of Požega.”<sup>94</sup> The amount of military equipment distributed among the deserters and rural population presented a condition which rendered the local authorities powerless.

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<sup>92</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 116.

<sup>93</sup> David Stevenson, *With our Backs*, pp. 301 – 302.

<sup>94</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 126.

Another common trope from these telegraphic reports refers to the necessity of establishing a court-martial in order to effectively suppress the anarchy throughout the land. However, the already described incapability of the forces of order made this attempt ineffective, as we can see in one notice from Dubrava: “Because of the lack of security guard,<sup>95</sup> and despite the court-martial being introduced, the stores ... were robbed.”<sup>96</sup> In Dugo Selo, approximately fifteen kilometres from Zagreb, the local official was asking for “immediate and unconditional proclamation of the court-martial for soldiers and civilians alike, and implementation of the executions on spot.”<sup>97</sup> The most intriguing report is the one from Okučani on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November: “everything is pillaged. He [the official] knows who robbed, but cannot act against them, because he has no force. He cannot establish the court-martial, because he would have to hang the whole town.”<sup>98</sup> This account of the situation is indicative of the very nature of the upheaval, and shows that direct actions against the Zeleni kadar were out of the question, without the establishment of public order.

The blending of the civil population with soldiers, which stems from the previous example, becomes more obvious in other accounts of the uprisings. In one case, the official reports that “The mob claims it knows no authority, but itself, and supports the pillagers.”<sup>99</sup> In another, the information is very vague, but illustrates the situation across the land: “The wagons and warehouses at the railway station were robbed by the people of the nearby villages [enumerates almost a dozen villages] and the passing army.”<sup>100</sup> Although it is not clear to which ‘army’ this report refers to, the cooperation of peasantry and soldiers becomes apparent again. The images of the widespread upheaval are present in almost every report, but rarely

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<sup>95</sup> The reference to the official forces of order, The Peoples Guard, are usually comprised of various terms (like here: ‘security guard’), but certainly point to those official forces.

<sup>96</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 113.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

become as vivid as in the case from Krapinske Toplice in northern Croatia: “The armed men went ahead, and after them some old hags carrying baskets, and there were also a couple of horse-drawn carriages to haul the loot.”<sup>101</sup> However, the apparent concurrence of the pillagers and peasantry in general is hard to confirm, since in some cases peasants themselves captured and killed the attackers.<sup>102</sup>

The most precise depictions of the anarchy in the land are always concerned with the actual targets of the uprising. As I will attempt to argue in the end of this chapter, these actually point to the nature of the Zeleni kadar, because they identify various elements which the majority of the population held responsible for everything wrong within the society. However, the peasant attitudes towards the gentry, merchants and authority in general, also have a more practical side, which focused the Zeleni kadar’s violence on infrastructure, the train network, financial offices and, most important, food supplies.

Although the effects of destruction and violence in the late months of 1918 were devastating for the communication lines and transportation, it would be wrong to assume that the actions of the Zeleni kadar were focused on these targets for the reason of helping the Entente forces, primarily the Serbian army, to enter the land.<sup>103</sup> The raids focused on post offices, trains, warehouses and granaries were an everyday phenomenon, primarily because the masses of deserters and peasants aimed to supply their needs for food and acquire weapons, as means to continue doing so. For instance, in Orahovica, “The overall content of

<sup>101</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima”, p. 124.

<sup>102</sup> Although these cases are rare, the most obvious is the one from Požega, which clearly mentions the peasantry aiming to catch the pillagers of one house; Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima”, p. 124.

<sup>103</sup> This assumption is apparent in Mira Kolar: “Privredni i socijalni razlozi“, pp. 177 – 179. The irony of such notion lies in the fact that the Zeleni kadar was silenced only after the Serbian troops entered the land and established order.



the barracks is distributed among the local people. Military uniforms, weapons, ammunition and other provisions are also pillaged.”<sup>104</sup>

Due to food shortages, which the whole Danubian Monarchy experienced by the end of the war, even the suburbs of Vienna were not spared from ransacking bands, whose targets were train loads filled with food and other everyday necessities.<sup>105</sup> The case in Croatia and Slavonia was no different. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, the station in Delnice reported: “In the night ... the Zeleni kadar with some part of the population attacked the railway station and completely pillaged two wagons of army provisions, namely: 88 crates of bread, 28 barrels of butter, 4 barrels of pig fat and 6 crates of chocolate.”<sup>106</sup> The trains and railroads were among the most common targets which caused the collapse of infrastructure. A report from the Lonja railroad speaks of the chaotic situation: “No traffic yesterday. The day before ... the train was held by the Zeleni kadar at Banova Jaruga. They disarmed the guards who defended it and forced the engineer to drive them to Pakrac ... Telephone and telegraph lines are disabled from Novska to Pakrac.”<sup>107</sup> The violence and destruction are reported in this fashion time and again. Food, primarily wheat, was also sought for in steam mills and noble estate granaries; the pillaging is so widespread and thorough that one official from Slatina concludes: “The people are setting fires and destroying, and I do not know with what shall we feed Dalmatia and Bosnia.”<sup>108</sup>

The Zeleni kadar’s activities were, apart from these targets, focused on landed gentry and merchants, who were very often Jewish.<sup>109</sup> Although the property of these two categories

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<sup>104</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 122.

<sup>105</sup> David Stevenson, *With our Backs*, p. 419.

<sup>106</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 114.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>109</sup> A more thorough research on the ethnic (or religious) category of merchants would be necessary here, especially based on the origin of the merchant's surnames (of those who were plundered): Doner, Fürst, Schreiber. See: Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 120.

included material goods, which were the common targets of the Zeleni kadar, we should distinguish them from previous examples because of their class characteristics. David Stevenson argued that the deserters from k. u. k. army and rebellious peasantry in the South Slavic lands formed an agrarian movement against the clergy and landlords, but also a nationalistic movement against the Hungarian rule.<sup>110</sup> While the reports of noble estates being raided are frequent, we should not consider the clergy as a target in Croatia and Slavonia, since information on them as victims of violence is non-existent in this body of sources. In the case of noble property, however, in the area around Slatina, the people turned to abuse of merchants because the noble estates were already thoroughly robbed.<sup>111</sup> In other parts nobility was among the primary targets; count Bomballes reports from the area around Varaždin that “the pillagers’ activity is so widespread, that all his considerable supplies will go to ruin in the shortest time, if an energetic reaction is not provided.”<sup>112</sup>

Apart from nobility, the merchants were perceived as exploiting elements, and were targeted as well. As the Jewish population was usually linked to merchant and broker activities, the anti-Semitic sentiment became present among the Zeleni kadar as well. A report from Daruvar indicates the motives which the pillagers at this point had: “Reasons for pillaging in the Daruvar district, as everywhere else, is the hatred towards the Jews because of the increasing of prices.”<sup>113</sup> Although this official took no account of the fact that the Jewish element was not the only one participating in merchant activities, a pattern is obvious and the anti-Semitic attitudes took roots among the peasantry in particular. The fact that these two classes, the nobility and the merchants, were among the primary targets of the Zeleni kadar’s violence, could lead us to ascribe revolutionary characteristics to this phenomenon.

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<sup>110</sup> David Stevenson, *With our Backs*, p. 480.

<sup>111</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 121.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

Even more, telegraphic correspondence consulted here contains information of revolutionary movement and Bolshevik influences. What we have to bear in mind, however, is that the officials reporting on the situation on the ground, as is obvious from their tone, actually interpreted various phenomena in a relatively free manner. An official stationed in Vinkovci evaluated the situation as follows: “The revolution [in the town] has a social character. Firstly they [the mass] attack the Jews, and then the counts and gentry in general. The mass, as it is addressed, approves, and as some agitator arrives (especially an ex-prisoner from Russia), they join him and start to pillage and burn.”<sup>114</sup> In Erdevik, in eastern Slavonia,<sup>115</sup> the reporter stated that “while the Serbian troops were present, the most peaceful order was established, but as they received the command to leave, the Bolshevism rapidly spread.”<sup>116</sup>

The issue of establishing a critical position from which we can evaluate the credibility of this information would require a more thorough research, which would involve investigating the officials’ social background, political record and personal beliefs, which, unfortunately, falls out of scope in this work. However, the quantitatively small amount of reports talking about revolution is a datum which we can use for evaluative purposes; only three reports contain direct references to these categories, which suggests that the impact of revolutionary ideas, at least in Bolshevik manner, had little effect on the Zeleni kadar in whole.

On the other hand, the reports which the local officials submitted to the central office in Zagreb, very often provide us with a clear picture of national sentiment and its relevance for the soldiers and local population. The most sensitive spots for Croatian national identity

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<sup>114</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima”, p. 119.

<sup>115</sup> I place it according to contemporary situation. Today this town is a part of Serbia.

<sup>116</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 125.

were the issues with the Hungarians, and these will become obvious even more in the next chapter. Before the breakup of the Monarchy, the hottest point of dispute within the Hungarian part of the State, was the issue of language, which stirred national emotions even before the crisis at the end of the war.<sup>117</sup> The hostile attitude towards them, caused most of the Hungarian officials to leave Croatia and Slavonia. Those who attempted to stay were faced with violence and threats; for instance, a report from Plaški states that “the Hungarian officials are frightened because they are receiving threatening letters in which they are told that they would be killed if they spoke Hungarian.”<sup>118</sup> The rising importance of national identity and the sharpening of differences between the new countries in the interwar period, only confirmed the overwhelming weight of the nationalistic sentiments in the final months of the First World War.<sup>119</sup>

However, these were the attitudes typically exclusive of all other ethnicities, and not just reserved for one in particular. The Serbs, who were by local officials expected to restore order with their approaching army, were very often seen as an undesirable element, and clashes occurred even among the local population.<sup>120</sup> Primarily the borderlands presented areas where such clashes escalated rapidly. Apart from the new border with Hungary, the differences between the Bosnian Muslim population and the Croats vividly emerged in the areas close to the Sava river; such is the report from Petrinja: “A few thousand Bosnian Turks<sup>121</sup> have penetrated into Croatia. One pack of them is going towards Vojnić and the other towards Topusko ... They are burning, pillaging and killing. Even the Zeleni kadar is running

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<sup>117</sup> See more in: Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), especially: pp. 13, 15 – 16.

<sup>118</sup> Bogdan Krizman, p. 115.

<sup>119</sup> For these topics see: Magda Adam, esp. 230, Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999). esp. 3 – 4, 8.

<sup>120</sup> For instance, a report from Daruvar states: “Dangerous frictions among the Serb and Croat population. See Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 127.

<sup>121</sup> Refers to Bosnian Muslim population.

away ... If you send me some 60 men, I promise to destroy the Turkish packs in the area.”<sup>122</sup> Although it is not clear how the author of this account expected to pacify ‘a few thousand’ with sixty men, this report contains important information that even the Zeleni kadar fled from this Bosnian force, which indicates that the national sentiment was a category which closed the ranks of the Zeleni kadar on the basis of ethnic affiliation.

These observations show us that the Bolshevik influence in the upheaval in the late months of 1918, played a minor role in comparison with national identity. This argument becomes even more obvious when the Bolshevik ideas become completely marginalised in the cases in which the conflict emerged between the local population and the Russians, the supposed bearers of the revolutionary movement. In one case the official reported that “The Russian villains robbed the merchant Borovčak, a native man and Christian.”<sup>123</sup> Such cases apparently resulted with common attitude towards the Russians among the population. Near Pakrac, the people “routed the Russians ... under threat that they would kill them, if they would not leave the area.”<sup>124</sup> After these examples, we should be able to conclude that the ethnic element in the upheaval suppressed the revolutionary ideas and prevented Bolshevism from establishing a firm base in the ranks of Zeleni kadar.

Finally, a general statement about the nature of the anarchy and the phenomenon of the Zeleni kadar should take into account various attitudes which emerged with the collapse of the system of authority. However, this mixture of deserters, returning soldiers and peasantry is still a vague category, which at this point avoids clearer definition. One last aspect, which is perhaps the most relevant for our understanding of the Zeleni kadar, is the attitude of the peasantry towards authority in general, and sometimes emerges through the

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<sup>122</sup> Bogdan Krizman, “Građa o nemirima“, p. 121.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

accounts of officials of the People's Council. The statement in one report that "the people do not understand freedom",<sup>125</sup> finds its support in other cases as well. For instance, in Pregrada, "The peasants claim that they can now do whatever they want, because it is freedom now."<sup>126</sup> A more thorough official recorded on the same issue: "The peasants are selling cattle, cutting forests and stealing wheat ... It will be a great effort to pull the people together. I have to state a sad fact that the peasants do not want to work the fields because they claim: 'we have enough for ourselves, and the gentlemen can die, for all we care.'"<sup>127</sup> This attitude reveals a characteristic hatred towards authority, which the peasantry violently expressed in the situation of administrative collapse. In the beginning of 1919, a newspaper article entitled "Are our people mature enough to embrace freedom?" revised the situation in a manner in which I would like to conclude:

It is said that our people are not yet ready for freedom, that they do not understand what is good for them, that they went mad after the war, that they pillage, do not listen to authorities, and that they conceive freedom as the right to do what they want ... Whose fault is it? This is primarily the result of this long war. Being at the front for four years, faced with slaughter and murder, has killed in many the feeling of humanness; behind the front – hell: you have to starve, without shoes and clothes, and spend the whole winter in darkness; be hungry and looked down on by the superiors ... to be in such a desperate condition, that nothing worse never existed. Who would not lose his common sense?<sup>128</sup>

The author of this short account probably grasped the situation better than the officials of the People's Council a few months earlier. The gloomy image of the atmosphere in the late months of 1918 and the atrocities in the hinterland committed by the deserters, returning soldiers and uprising peasantry, left a strong imprint in the mentality and memory of Croatian society. The main effect of the phenomenon of *Zeleni kadar* is that it brought the experience

<sup>125</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Građa o nemirima", p. 122.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 120

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

<sup>128</sup> Taken from: Željko Martan, "Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'", p. 619.

of the war and its horrors to the hinterland, and this casts a shadow over the soldiers' memoirs and literary works of the interwar period.



Map 1. Croatia and Slavonia within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

### 3. MEMOIRES AND LITERARY EXPERIENCES OF THE WAR

As I have argued in the introduction, the experience of the war presents a basis for long-lasting memory traces. Introducing the reader to his memoir, Dubravčić stated: “It has been almost twenty years since the beginning of the World War. War experiences, images names of peoples and places slowly disappear from memory – they are fading away, vanishing. However, some memories have cut deep into my soul and will remain there until death.”<sup>129</sup> In this chapter I will analyse the autobiographic accounts with regards to observations made in the previous chapter. The relevance of the Zeleni kadar in this argument is that its appearance brought the experience of the war to the hinterland and shaped the narratives of the contemporaries. In the second subchapter, our understanding of the written accounts on the past will be deepened through an analysis of literary works which drew upon the topics from the First World War as their authors’ inspiration.

#### 3. 1. The Soldiers and their Memories

The list of memoirs in Croatian, written by the veterans of the First World War, surpasses the number of sixty published works, and all of them are introduced in Hameršak’s overview of these autobiographic accounts.<sup>130</sup> The fact that I will consult only several of these, should be explained here, because it may resolve the apparently provisory act of choosing the body of memoirs for my research. An approach encompassing the whole body

<sup>129</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Filip Hameršak, “Priče veterana. Ulomci priča veterana Prvoga svjetskog rata“ (The Stories of Veterans. The Fragments of World War I Veterans' Stories), *Hrvatska revija*, vol. 3 (2014), pp. 59 – 69.



of available memoir literature unfortunately falls out of the scope of this work, and the possibilities of quantitative analysis of recurring tropes, ideas and images in these works, should remain a topic for further research. Here however, noticing the attitudes which some of the veterans expressed in their accounts, and which are closely connected to our topic, will present a much needed supplement to the achromatic content of the official documentation analysed in the previous chapter.

Although the issue of provisional selection of the source material (and this is not confined only to this case, but generally presents a deep methodological issue) still stands at this point, I argue that a more disputable aspect of the nature of memoirs, lies in the fact that they were written by individuals who are non-representative of the wider social and cultural basis, in other words, the authors of written accounts formed a ‘high culture’ discourse, which speaks little of the illiterates’ attitudes and fails to represent their point of view.<sup>131</sup> This issue bears repercussions for our attempt to view the First World War from ‘below’, because of the different attitudes between the intellectual elite, who produced the memoirs, and the peasantry, who was the bulk of the Zeleni kadar and the main actor of the upheaval at the end of 1918. However, the accounts which we will examine in this chapter, gain credibility as we compare them with the findings in the previous chapter.

The soldier’s memoirs are abundant with the tropes regarding shortages of army provisions, which, as we have seen, affected the troops’ morale and presented a motive for disobedience and avoiding the military service. As we already noticed in Maček’s account of soldiers’ discontent regarding the quality of food,<sup>132</sup> this pressing issue stimulated the negative impact on the army discipline. The example which vividly enforces this argument

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<sup>131</sup> This idea is a part of criticism of Paul Fussell's work, and is brought out in: Leonard V. Smith, “Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory: Twenty-Five Years Later“, *History and Theory*, vol. 40 (May, 2001), p. 243.

<sup>132</sup> See page 20.

emerges from an episode at the Italian front which was recorded by Messner-Sporšić: “The colonel then ordered that the officers will have to stand by the cauldron with cocked revolvers, and shoot down anyone who would refuse to take food or complain about its quality. The soldiers immediately responded: ‘Let them shoot, it’s all the same to us, whether we get killed now or starve to death two months later.’”<sup>133</sup>

These attitudes among the soldiers were an indicator of the Austro-Hungarian incapability to continue to wage the war, and, more fundamentally, to sustain the necessary level of army discipline. Another issue, emerging from the loosening of military grip on the soldiers’ discipline, was the disappearance of the officers’ authority. Frane Dubravčić, whose account is often permeated with ironic observations, remembered seeing a certain captain, who was injured by inhaling the poisonous gas after one of the many attempts to breach the Italian front, and commented on the captain’s condition: “I wonder if the officer’s drinking ceremony last night actually did him more harm than the gas in the no-man’s land.”<sup>134</sup> The resentment towards the officers was fuelled by yet another circumstance, which draws upon the national issues within the monarchy, namely, the composition of the officer core, which favoured the German and Hungarian nationality. Messner-Sporšić argued that the success of the k. u. k. army in the early years of the war could have been ascribed to the hopes of different national groups for the political freedoms under the Habsburg rule, the idea which obviously disappeared by the end of 1918. Elaborating his claim, he brought out his personal experience regarding these matters: “Before the offensive, you could hear orders issued in Hungarian, but after the battle, in the field hospitals, the groans and cries were in Slavic languages.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ante Messner-Sporšić, *1915 – 1918 Odlomci iz ratnih uspomena*, (Fragments from War Memories) (Zagreb: Tipografija, 1934) p. 167.

<sup>134</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 117 – 118.

<sup>135</sup> Ante Messner-Sporšić, pp. 182 – 183.

The resentment which the soldiers expressed towards the army structures motivated many of them to employ all means at their disposal in order to avoid reenlisting. Even prior to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian military machine and the widespread appearance of desertion, the horrors experienced at the front presented for soldiers a good reason to avoid the military service. In case of Maček's account, we are often left with an impression of him being an honest man and responsible individual, who aimed to contribute to, what was in his own view, a normal life in the unfortunate times of war. However, the experience of the front was obviously decisive for him to manipulate the military organisation in order to stay out of the battle. The fact that he was healed of his wounds, sustained at the Serbian front before the Christmas of 1914, presented a precondition for his return to the front. Nonetheless, contrary to the characteristic moral tropes within his narrative, he provided us with a typical account of the recruit aiming to avoid the trenches: "Since I had no great urge to go back to the front, I used the fact that my eyesight was not normal."<sup>136</sup> The war experience obviously transformed Maček's perception of the military service, since he utilized his physical flaw to stay out of the conflict only after he conceived the atrocities of the war in Serbia.

By the end of the war, most of the wounded soldiers, along with those who were allowed their military leave, were naturally keen to stay out of the battle for good. In the late summer of 1918, Dubravčić felt that he had enough of trenches, shellfire and enemy assaults. The last chapter of his memoir, titled "I've had enough of war!"<sup>137</sup>, contains episodes of his attempts to stay at home, and to provide sufficient evidence of his incapability to serve in the army. In one case he attempted to appear sick at the medical examination, which would grant him further release from the service. In a concise description of this attempt we are presented with elaborate ways to deceive the army physicians:

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<sup>136</sup> Vladko Maček, *Memoari*, p. 60.

<sup>137</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, pp. 151 – 172.

I turned to my friends and asked them for a preparation which would make me ill. One gave me a caffeine powder which I was supposed to drink half an hour before the examination and thus cause arrhythmia. The other one offered me a medicine which would cause an artificial lung catarrh. The third one, my army companion, offered to give me a milk injection under the skin just before the examination, which would cause high temperature.<sup>138</sup>

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

These tropes which illustrate the formation of soldiers' attitudes with regards to the conditions at the front, and hostility towards the army structures, pertain to the issues which emerged as the Austro-Hungarian State dissolved, and as the widespread appearance of the deserters ignited the upheaval throughout the hinterland of the Monarchy. The transition from passive insubordination to open desertion appeared as the outcome of the war became apparent, and the authorities lost the means of coercion. Dubravčić's examination did not go well for him; he was found healthy and was issued an order to join the march-battalion. However, he never saw the front again. As he was repeatedly proclaimed capable for military service, he lost his nerve with the latest physician he visited. Cursing the officers who managed to spend the whole war behind the lines and asserting his four-year experience of the trenches, he ended his visit with a threat: "So, if you obviously can't help me, I'll help myself! I'll join the Zeleni kadar!"<sup>139</sup> The doctor was apparently stunned with his statement and proclaimed him ill and incapable for combat. This episode shows that at this point, in the late 1918, the regime dramatically lost the grip over its personnel, which was the main indicator of collapse and incapability to rein the ensuing upheaval.

<sup>138</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 155.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

Although the Austro-Hungary was not capable of sustaining resistance along the fronts by the end of 1918, the disintegration of the army, following the military defeat, was the final blow to the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>140</sup> The memoirs of the war veterans usually contain thick descriptions of the chaotic situation. Vlatko Uzorinac recollected on these events:

The breakup of Austria-Hungary in the October of 1918 primarily left an impact on the soldiers. One part of them dropped their weapons and left the units, while the others started to pillage the military and state magazines ... and drunk with the accomplished 'freedom' launched experimental assaults on private property. They were recklessly shooting their rifles throughout the towns and villages, forcefully released criminals from prisons and committed various atrocities.<sup>141</sup>

These images of an overall breakdown are visible in other accounts as well, and contain similar tropes. Maček remembered that the Croat soldiers at the Italian front demanded from their officers to be taken away from the frontline, and, as the officers refused, soldiers started to leave in large groups. As he recollects, he managed to gain control over his regiment, but only after promising the men that he would lead them to the hinterland, where everyone could find their way home. Furthermore, he remembers that everyone, including the men he was leading, was freely taking provisions from the military magazines.<sup>142</sup> Messner-Sporšić, who was also returning from the Italian battleground, repeated these images of complete disorder in his own account. His observations are telling for the atmosphere in which the Austria-Hungary disappeared, but also speak about the attitudes which were crucial for the men participating in the Zeleni kadar: "Thus, the nations of the former Monarchy parted from each other, and together left the old State, in which they could not achieve real social equality – not to mention the national freedoms!"<sup>143</sup>

<sup>140</sup> David Stevenson, *With our Backs*, pp. 305, 532.

<sup>141</sup> Vlatko Uzorinac, "Operacije naših odreda u Međimurju, Koruškoj i Štajerskoj godine 1918. – 1919." (Operations of our Units in Međimurje, Koruška and Štajerska in the Years 1918 – 1919), in: Petar Jelavić (ed.), *Hrvati u borbama*, p. 123.

<sup>142</sup> Vladko Maček, *Memoari*, pp. 66 – 69.

<sup>143</sup> Ante Messner-Sporšić, *1915 – 1918 Odlomci*, p. 193.

With the last statement the issue of the author's credibility to make judgment comes into play. As I have argued above, the demonization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire presented an important discourse in the narratives concerning the Habsburg era, and Messner-Sporšić's account fits into the body of works which utilized on the alleged flaws in the Austro-Hungarian structure to explain the causes for upheaval at the end of the war, including the appearance of Zeleni kadar. The negative attitude towards the former State is apparent in the memoir literature published in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where the topics concerning the Austria-Hungary presented a basis for establishing a Yugoslav national ideology.<sup>144</sup>

However, the difference in political and social circumstances, as the factors which influenced the authors of memoirs, become apparent when their narratives deal with the ever-present topic of Bolshevik influences in the context of Austro-Hungarian breakup. The most obvious example of the stigmatization of communist ideology in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia<sup>145</sup> influencing personal recollections of a war veteran is Ante Vrgoč's memoir. He was captured by the Russian troops at the Eastern front in 1914 and spent six years in captivity, reaching Vladivostok in 1920 and returning by a ship to Croatia. His experience of the Russian revolution is charged with negative observations, and Vrgoč zealously emphasises his position as an inveterate anti-communist. Describing an episode in which an old acquaintance who recently became a Bolshevik commissar, and whom he met in captivity, offered him the position of Soviet ambassador in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Vrgoč promptly transformed his account into a pamphlet-like narrative:

I immediately distanced myself and refused the offer, because I never was, and never could be a communist – because of the doctrine itself. Even if I was an

<sup>144</sup> For the topic of national issues in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia see: Aleksandar Ignjatović, "From Constructed Memory to Imagined National Tradition: The Tomb of the Unknown Yugoslav Soldier (1934-38)", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 88 (October 2010), pp. 624 – 651. Although focused on the national issues within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the attempts to create national myths based on narratives which include the demonization of Austria-Hungary is also addressed.

<sup>145</sup> The Communist Party was rendered illegal in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1920, and this extended to the period of Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

enemy of the Tsarists, it does not follow that I was one of them [the Bolsheviks] ... Compulsion – that is the communists' programme! And can brute force resolve a single philosophical or scientific problem?! ... Communism is a movement without an ethical foundation, because its only tool is: violence and compulsion.<sup>146</sup>

Vrgoč's scolding of the Bolsheviks rendered his narrative acceptable with regards to the dominant anti-communist attitude in the political and public discourse in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The similar characteristics appear in most of the accounts published in the book of the Međimurje campaign veterans' memoirs. For instance, Branko Svoboda recollected that the Croats in Međimurje were waiting for the remnants of organised Croatian troops to liberate them from the "red Hungarian hordes."<sup>147</sup> Or Dragutin V. Perko's account: "The Bolshevik propaganda seized upon some of our [Croatian] areas as well, but failed to produce a deeper impact. It is because our troops had strongly developed national consciousness. The Bolshevik propagandists from Hungary had no luck with us."<sup>148</sup> The irony of this emphasis on the Soviet influences in the interwar period accounts is that it produced an unintended effect, with the 1950's historiography drawing conclusions of a strong Bolshevik presence in these areas based on reinterpretation of these accounts.<sup>149</sup>

Although it would be hard to claim that Maček's memoir, written in the United States in the eve of the Cold War, is not subject to another form of ideological conditioning, his account on the issue is somewhat deprived of the moral judgement. As he caught up with the men from his regiment, who decided to leave the front, he observed that parts of it already acquired Bolshevik characteristics, with commissars at the head of some squads. He claimed

<sup>146</sup> Ante Vrgoč, *Moje uspomene na svjetski rat* (My Memories of the World War), (Samobor: Tiskara Dragutina Spullera, 1937.), pp. 484 – 486.

<sup>147</sup> Branko Svoboda, "S međimurskih polja" (From the Međimurje fields), in: Petar Jelavić (ed.), *Hrvati u borbama*, p. 10. The obvious reference of the red colour is to the communist soldiers.

<sup>148</sup> Dragutin V. Perko, "Oslobođenje Međimurja" (The liberation of Međimurje), in: Petar Jelavić (ed.), *Hrvati u borbama*, p. 103.

<sup>149</sup> The socialist period historiographers in Yugoslavia rarely supported their claims of Bolshevik presence among the Zeleni kadar with reference to source material. My argument is that various non-critical filtering of source data occurred in the 1950's which disregarded the ideological position of the authors of the accounts mentioning the Soviet influences at the end of 1918. See chapter 2. 2.

that the main actors here were former Russian prisoners of war, who were degraded in the Austro-Hungarian ranks, because they let themselves be captured.<sup>150</sup> Even though we are presented with the trope of the captured Austro-Hungarian soldiers at the Eastern front as the bearers of Bolshevik ideas, if we are to believe Maček's account, these formations soon disintegrated. In this context, Newman's argument that the socialist ideals were present among the Croatian intellectuals and that those returnees from Russian captivity made a fatal blow for the Austro-Hungarian authority,<sup>151</sup> appears overemphasised.

Dubravčić's position however, should be interpreted with more caution, while no apparent influences shaped his narrative, besides the mechanisms of individual memory. He emigrated to the United States soon after the First World War, and there wrote his memoir, which remained in handwriting until 2002, when it was published in Croatia. As an account which was virtually intended for the needs of the author, his close family and friends, we are left with a memoir which contains no visible political connotations. Regarding the Bolshevik influences, Dubravčić mentions them only once, and that is through evocation of civil attitudes towards that ideology. "For some nights in a row, you could hear the fusillade around the barracks in Špilnik, and later it moved towards the town. Everything was indicating that something was changing, but what was it to be? 'Hopefully not communism?' – the citizens anxiously commented, overwhelmed with fear."<sup>152</sup> For the reason he was under no censorship while writing this private memoir, and with no intended wider audience, we may consider Dubravčić's account accurate, as far as the obstacles of his own memory permitted him to reproduce his individual experience.

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<sup>150</sup> Vladko Maček, *Memoari*, pp. 68 – 69.

<sup>151</sup> John Paul Newman, "Post-imperial and Post-war", p. 252.

<sup>152</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 162.



Furthermore, the facts he brings out often correspond with the official documentation of the local authorities of the People's Council. Namely, Dubravčić was a witness of the Zeleni kadar activities in the Otočac area during the late October and early November. Apart from mentioning the shooting at the Špilnik barracks, an event also recorded in the report dated 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, he was one of the organisers of the People's Guard and cooperated with the author of this official report, doctor Jovo Polovina, who was the president of the local People's council committee.<sup>153</sup>

Through this obvious interrelation of Dubravčić's memoir and official telegraphic correspondence, it seems possible to establish means of evaluating the credibility of one's personal account of the past. Bearing this in mind, along the absence of any obvious political or ideological influence embedded in his narrative, this memoir certainly takes a specific place in this discussion. Apart from this, it may present an answer for yet another dilemma of this chapter, which is the historiographic use of autobiographic literature presented with an issue of 'high culture' phenomenon distorting the image of 'ordinary' people.

The blatant example of such division between the intellectual point of view and the attitudes of common people, comes from Maček's account of political changes and the establishment of the short-lasting government of the People's Council on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1918. He claims that the bulk of the population, primarily the peasants, observed sceptically as the tendencies to unite with the Kingdom of Serbia among the members of the new government became apparent. Maček remembers talking to a veteran coming from a peasant family who, although happy that the Hungarian yoke was over, asked him: "Do you think, captain, that it will be better now; don't you think that the Serbs will mount us now?"

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<sup>153</sup> See: Bogdan Krizman, "Građa o nemirima", p. 119; Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, pp. 161 – 162. Dubravčić accounts for most of the personal names only with the initial letter, so here we are presented with a certain 'doctor P., who was a president of the People's committee', obviously referring to the author of the Otočac report.

Expressing his admiration for the veteran's discernment, Maček cited Montesquieu: "I really like talking to a peasant. He is not learned to such a degree, where he could make erroneous conclusions."<sup>154</sup>

With this example it becomes obvious how the literate elite failed to represent the view of those who left no written record of their own. However, pointing back to Dubravčić's account, we can again compare it to the available official documentation in order to get some sense of credibility in this context. The period of widespread upheaval and the peak of Zeleni kadar's activities in the area around Otočac are thoroughly recorded in his memoir; he remembers the situation on one public assembly organised by the local officials on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October:

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

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

Then one peasant from Staro Selo, Miljan Rus, asked to speak: 'But gentlemen, what will happen with rakija baking?'<sup>155</sup>

'Bake, Miljan, as much as you want. It's freedom now!', the others responded.<sup>156</sup>

With the images emerging from this episode, it is hard to distance ourselves from the impression that Dubravčić provided us with an unbiased narrative of the turbulent period in the fall of 1918, and that in this case the voices of the illiterate majority are not distorted through an intellectual's point of view. The attitude of the common people, expressed at the end of this account with the sentence 'It's freedom now!' strikingly resembles the content of the official reports, presented at the end of the previous chapter. The layers of various

<sup>154</sup> Maček, *Memoari*, p. 75.

<sup>155</sup> Rakija is a local brandy, traditionally made of plums. The distilling process is colloquially called 'baking'.

<sup>156</sup> Frane Dubravčić, *Živ sam i dobro mi je*, p. 161.

autobiographic narratives presented here, should therefore be analysed in this manner, in order to render memoir literature susceptible to historiographic research.

### 3. 2. The Literary Experience of the War

Adam Kożuchowski noticed the capacity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to inspire the literary imagination of some outstanding authors.<sup>157</sup> This chapter will deal with three literates who found their interest in the topics regarding the Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War, and left us with a body of literature which speaks of period's atrocities with nostalgia, resentment and irony. Here, the works of Miroslav Krleža and Jaroslav Hašek, who both participated as soldiers in the war, will be juxtaposed to Stefan Zweig's literary representation of the Austria-Hungary, which will result with an understanding of the weight of war experience for the images occurring in these works.

These accounts will present us with a form of literary memory of highly interpretative character, which, besides the issues of individual memory, introduce the problems of literary representation and author's backgrounds. These two issues, as I will show, are bind together, as literary work of the author speaks of his life, and his underlying experience influences the ideas present in his work.<sup>158</sup> The analysis of the difference in author's attitudes to the war and legacy of Austria-Hungary, will point to the relevance of war experience, which was one of the features the Zeleni kadar carried and brought to the people of Croatia and Slavonia.

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<sup>157</sup> Adam Kożuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: the image of the Habsburg Monarchy in interwar Europe*, (Pittsburgh, Panama. : University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>158</sup> Roger Woods, "The Conservative Revolution and the First World War: Literature as Evidence in Historical Explanation", *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 85 (January, 1990), p. 78.

The concern over the soldiers' destiny in the Great War, although in a rather different literary fashion, was therefore characteristic for Krleža and Hašek, who served in the Austro-Hungarian army themselves. Krleža's rebellious nature led him to join the Serbian army in 1912 as a protest to the Austro-Hungarian State, but upon his return to the Monarchy, he was drafted into the military to fight for the Habsburg cause in Galicia. After spending some time on the first lines, for the reason of bad health, he was sent back to the rear, where he spent the rest of the war in military hospitals.<sup>159</sup> Hašek's war experience was somewhat different. Although, similarly to Krleža, drafted into the k. u. k. army and sent to the Eastern front, he was soon captured by the Russians and returned to Prague only in 1920, after participating in the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>160</sup>

The soldiers' life in the World War I and their attitudes become apparent in the works of these two authors. Kožuchowski described Hašek's main character, Josef Švejk,<sup>161</sup> cunning, adventurous and philosophical as no other Austrian soldier, through which Hašek mocked the anachronisms of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.<sup>162</sup> However, the literary tropes emerging in the narrative of his work, point to Hašek's war experience and remind us of various features commonly shared among the soldiery. Permeated with sarcasm and cynical observations, his account reminds us of the soldiers' attitudes to the war; when Švejk is asked by his superior, lieutenant Lukáš, if he is happy with the fact that they will together go to the front, he ironically responds: "Humbly report, sir, I'm awfully happy ... It'll be really marvellous when we both fall dead together for His Imperial Majesty and the Royal Family..."<sup>163</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Daniel Gerould, "Miroslav Krleža; A Croatian Writer against War", *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 25 (September, 2003), p. 132 – 133.

<sup>160</sup> For Hašek's detailed biography, see: Cecil Parrot, *The Bad Bohemian: A Life of Jaroslav Hašek Creator of the Good Soldier Švejk*, (London: Bodley Head, 1978).

<sup>161</sup> Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk and his Fortunes in the World War*, (London: Penguin Books, 1974).

<sup>162</sup> Adam Kožuchowski, *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary*, pp. 111 – 112.

<sup>163</sup> Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, p. 213.

Since it would be hard to even mention all the episodes where Švejk avoids the punishment inflicted for him by the military authorities and where Hašek obviously mocks the regime juxtaposing an ‘idiotic’ soldier to the administrative labyrinths and finally shows him as successful, here we shall mention another episode which regards our concern for the attitudes among the ‘ordinary’ people in the World War. Getting lost on his way to Budějovice, where he was supposed to join his regiment, Švejk experiences the life in the wartime hinterland. The accordion player he met on the way took him for a deserter, and offered to hide him with his sister: “She has been keeping her husband hidden in a stable for two months already – he confined to Švejk – so she can hide you too and you’ll be able to stay there until the end of the war. And if there are two of you it’ll be jollier.” After refusing this offer, Švejk encountered an elderly man who also took him for a deserter and who started to complain about the “robbers, vagabonds and thieves, masses of whom were infesting the whole district of Písek. ‘They run away from the army, they don’t want to serve in it and they roam about the whole district and steal.’”<sup>164</sup>

With this reference to the appearance of deserters in the hinterland of the monarchy, Hašek draws upon his own experience, and points to the fact that the phenomenon was a common trope throughout the Monarchy in the period of the war. In Krleža’s case, the fates of soldiers are embedded in the contrast of the mechanisation of the war against the tormented human individual.<sup>165</sup> In a short story *The Battle of Bistrica Lesna* Krleža introduces us with his cynical tone:

This history of one detail of the battle of Bistrica Lesna is written in honour of late ser corporal Pesek Mato and six dead Home-Guards of the second battalion of the second company, namely: Trdak Vid, Blažek Franjo, Lohorc Štef, Lovrek Štef, Pecak Imbra and Križ Matija, who all fell in a heroic assault on the hill three hundred and thirteen, thus spilling their Royal Hungarian Home-Guard blood for

<sup>164</sup> Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, p. 244.

<sup>165</sup> Tode Čolak, “Ratna lirika Miroslava Krleže” (The War Lyrics of Miroslav Krleža), in: Marijan Matković (ed.) *Miroslav Krleža 1973*, (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1975), p. 67.

the glory of the thousand-year old Kingdom of Saint Stephen, in accordance with the Hungarian-Croatian compromise of 1868. May they rest in peace!<sup>166</sup>

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

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

To whom did he ever do wrong? It was him who was deprived of his six-week leave, and they pushed own wife with a gunstock away from him at the barrack's fence! They have scarified him, dragged him around the hospitals, stole his shoes, and now they're firing at him? Who is that pig which dares to fire at him? Let's see Štef Loborec, will he stand this for long, that just everyone pounds at him?<sup>167</sup>

These concerns escalating to anger, which the soldiers commonly shared, particularly the deprivation of the army leave, also apparent in other testimonies,<sup>168</sup> speak of Krleža's capability to represent the troubles, which those who were forced into the conflict, had to bear with. The war experience shared by Krleža and Hašek obviously shaped their narratives and emerges through episodes and literary tropes as a testimony to their acquaintance with the soldier's psychology.

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<sup>166</sup> Miroslav Krleža, *Hrvatski bog Mars*, (Zagreb: Zora, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>168</sup> Particularly in Dubravčić's testimony, where he repeatedly aims to avoid going back to the front after his military leave.

In order to understand the weight of such experience for the shaping of one's literary work, here I will juxtapose Zweig's recollections in his autobiographic novel to the narratives of Krleža and Hašek. Being a part of Jewish intellectual elite and a class protected by the sacralised person of the Habsburg Emperor,<sup>169</sup> Zweig failed to state his position regarding the human suffering and meaninglessness of the war, which was experienced by a large majority of the people in the Austria-Hungary. In his *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig admits that "in order to describe the war in a poetic synthesis, I lacked the most important thing: I had not seen it."<sup>170</sup> However, his subsequent war experience was formed only as he was travelling to Budapest and encountered the hospital trains returning from the front:

But the worst of all were the hospital trains which I had to use two or three times. How little they resembled the well-lighted, white, carefully cleaned ambulance trains in which the archduchess and the fashionable ladies of the Viennese society had their pictures taken as nurses at the beginning of the war! What I saw to my dismay were ordinary freight cars without real windows, with only one narrow opening for air, lighted within by sooty oil lamps. One crude stretcher stood next to the other, and all were occupied by moaning, sweating, deathly pale men, who were grasping for breath in the thick atmosphere of excrement and iodoform ... Covered with blood-stained rags, the men lay on straw on the hard wood of the stretchers, and in each one of the cars there lay at least two or three dead among the dying and groaning.<sup>171</sup>

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

The striking difference between the literary accounts of Zweig, as opposed to Krleža and Hašek, originates from his own detachment from the reality of the front, which he never experienced. The nostalgia for the Habsburg dynasty, and even thrill which he felt at the beginning of the war,<sup>172</sup> stand in sharp contrast with Krleža's and Hašek's position. Krleža

<sup>169</sup> Leon Botstein, "Stefan Zweig and the Illusions of the Jewish European", *Jewish Social Attitudes*, vol. 44 (Winter, 1982), p. 67.

<sup>170</sup> Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) p. 246.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 249.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 224.

would directly address such attitudes, asserting the contemporary literary anachronisms: “What is fashionable in the European literature today should be named Zweigery [Zweigovština] ... And why for the devil’s sake do we need these sweet-glazed pretzels of that kind of literature as Zweig’s is? Steiermark zither. For spinsters. For cretins. People are sitting in dugouts, shooting at each other and reading Zweig.”<sup>173</sup> The alienation of Zweig’s literature from contemporary attitudes, present among the soldiery and masses, is also, although indirectly, mocked by Hašek. In an episode where Švejk meets an overenthusiastic Austrian recruit Biegler, the nonsense of glorification of the Austrian cause, which Zweig obviously approved of, is given through a ridiculously long list of titles, which Biegler hoped to turn into great works:

The Characters of the Warriors of the Great War. – Who Began the War? – The Policy of Austria-Hungary and the Origin of the World War ... The Glorious Day of Austria-Hungary. – Slav Imperialism and the World War ... Our Dynasty in the World War. – People of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy under Arms ... How the Enemies of Austria-Hungary Fight. – Who will be the Victors? – Our Officers and our Men. – Memorable Acts of My Soldiers ... The Book of Austro-Hungarian Heroes ... The Heroes of Our March Battalion ... Forward with the Sons of Austria-Hungary! ... Faithful Sons of the Fatherland ... Blood and Iron. – Victory or Death. – Our Heroes in Captivity.<sup>174</sup>

Ridiculing the war propaganda in this fashion, Hašek transformed his individual experience and attitude as a veteran into a satiric work, and emphasised the irrelevance of such notions for the common soldiers.

The interplay of war representation and personal experience in the cases of Hašek and Krleža closely resemble the atrocities with which the soldiers were faced in the war. The discrepancy between the officer core and ordinary soldiers, expressed in some of the memoirs

<sup>173</sup> Miroslav Krleža, *Pijana novembarska noć 1918. i drugi zapisi* (The drunken November night of 1918 and other accounts), (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 1973), p. 16.

<sup>174</sup> Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, p. 489 – 490.



presented in the previous chapter,<sup>175</sup> emerges again through painful images in Krleža's novella *Barrack Five B*, where a Croatian recruit Vidović is lying wounded in the barracks:

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

...

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

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

...

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

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

...

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

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

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

In the realization of his last pathetic idea, Vidović bent to reach his container, and, while falling, he already felt how his hands mired into the horrible matter – and everything was drowned in a torrent of blood.<sup>176</sup>

The motive of suffering soldiers, juxtaposed to the easy-living officer core, plays a significant role in the soldiers' attitudes towards the military authorities. Experienced by Krleža in this manner, the tropes of inequality in the army enhanced the negative perception of the authority by the peasantry, which already formulated its discontent even before the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian regime. These were recorded in Krleža's memoir, *Distant Days*,<sup>177</sup>

<sup>175</sup> See pages: 45 – 46.

<sup>176</sup> Miroslav Krleža, *Hrvatski bog Mars*, p. 289 – 290.

<sup>177</sup> Miroslav Krleža, *Davni dani* (Distant Days), (Zagreb: Zora, 1956).

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

or:

Franz Josef bought some petrol, his Empire ended up on auction...<sup>178</sup>

With these popular verses, which Krleža viewed as *zelenokaderaški*,<sup>179</sup> we are presented with a clear picture of peasant attitudes towards the regime, which, combined with the experience that the deserting soldiers brought, formed a basis for the eruption of anger and the emergence of the Zeleni kadar phenomenon.

Unfortunately, a deeper insight into the literary representations of these authors falls out of the scope of this work. However, with these examples, the connection between the author's background and personal experience comes into play, as the literary works obviously bear the marks of individual recollections. The relevance of this observation for coping with autobiographic accounts and their written forms in history proves fundamental. Furthermore, the tropes and motives emerging from the works presented in this chapter, obviously evoke the reality which the authors experienced. Therefore, our understanding of the period's mentalities, in this case the attitudes of the 'ordinary' people in the First World War, can be deepened by employing the literary art-works of the contemporaries.

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<sup>178</sup> In Croatian: *Care Karlo i Carice Zita, što ratuješ kada nemaš žita?/Franja Josip kupio benzina, na bubanj mu ode carevina...* Miroslav Krleža, *Davni dani*, p. 356 – 357.

<sup>179</sup> Meaning: that which bears the characteristic of the Zeleni kadar.

## CONCLUSION

The appearance of the Zeleni kadar and the widespread upheaval in Croatia and Slavonia in the final months of 1918 was a manifestation of the popular anger which violently erupted as the existing administrative structures disappeared along with the Austro-Hungarian State. Apart from its undermining activity, the Zeleni kadar presented a phenomenon which left a deep mental imprint in the Croatian society. “Everything looked as if the existing system of values, anachronistic hierarchical structures and ingrained norms and laws, crumbled under the wrath of peasants often joined by the armed soldiers from the surrounding forests.”<sup>180</sup> The weight of these images speaks of the events which erased the notion of the everlasting Habsburg Monarchy in a matter of several months.

As we have seen, the role of various factors which shaped the attitude of soldiers and peasantry during the First World War, needed revision in the form of evaluation of primary source material and critical distancing from earlier historiographic observations. Although the topic of Zeleni kadar, with the hundredth year anniversary of those events upon us, is finally being appropriately addressed, some of the issues presented in this thesis still stand. One of them, as I have shown, is the easiness with which some of the outdated academic work is uncritically reproduced.

Furthermore, the fact that the memoir literature and literary representations of the war are mostly (except Hameršak’s work) absent in historiographic research on this topic, presents an issue which will have to be addressed in further research. With this body of autobiographic accounts, which I have treated as historical sources, a much needed deepening of our understanding for the post-war upheaval in the Austro-Hungarian lands can be accomplished. With further methodological development and interdisciplinary approach, primarily taking

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<sup>180</sup> Željko Martan, “Ustanak 'pokvarenih elemenata'“, p. 594.

into consideration literary theory, these works can provide historians with a clearer picture of soldiers' attitudes, popular mentality and abrupt outburst of violence which took place throughout the Monarchy at the end of 1918.

As we have seen, memoir literature on the First World War in Croatia and the activities of Zeleni kadar contains thick descriptions of these events. Provided that other types of source material are consulted, and the context of time – cultural, social and political basis – in which those accounts appeared is taken into consideration, this body of literature, as I have shown, can point us to various aspects which are usually neglected in the official documentation. Apart from that, literary representations, some of which were analysed in this thesis, although they can provide us with even more vivid accounts of the Great War, should be further exposed to historiographic and literary theory. Since this work has pointed out the interrelation of authors' personal experience and the contents of their works, we have been able to discern relevant layers of popular attitudes. However, along the problems embedded in the 'high culture' concept, which point to incapability of the intellectual elite to grasp the attitudes of the 'silent' majority, at this point we should understand that literary representations hold much more information for historiographic understanding of the past.

Finally, I would like to emphasise this possibility of grasping the ties between a wider context and literary works, between cultural framework and individual memory, as a basis for further research. The case of apparent misconception of freedom by the peasantry, presented in this thesis,<sup>181</sup> should serve as a starting point for investigation of these phenomena. With a clear reference to the 'heroes' of Zeleni kadar, Dobriša Cesarić idealized this vague notion of freedom in a poem:<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> See pages: 41 – 42.

<sup>182</sup> This is the last part of the poem. The previous verses contain notions of freedom and flight (escape). This is my free translation, since the work is, unfortunately, not translated to other languages.

*And often, when I lie in the night,  
I feel a strong urge for flight.  
Where? Let the occasion set the course:  
that's a vigorous song within me  
of an old, dead deserter.*

*And he sings, sings of freedom  
without frontiers,  
and how the great forests  
are more beautiful than the fields,  
and how it's lovely, and how mad  
- Hey! -  
to cast away the chains.<sup>183</sup>*

It would be hard to dismiss this poem as a piece of work with no relevance for our understanding of the desertion at the end of the First World War, since the obvious inspiration for the author was a 'free' deserter in the Zeleni kadar. Although we cannot talk about the hard historical evidence in this case, we should not neglect the presented imagery and its possible basis. With literary representations of the past, and written manifestations of memory, this attitude is fundamental, and can open new possibilities for historiographic research. Finally, if the People's Council officials spoke of peasants' misconception of freedom at the end of 1918, perhaps Cesarić's poem, as romanticized it may be, illuminates for us the ideals which these deserters and peasants actually cherished.

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<sup>183</sup> Dobriša Cesarić, "Predi" (Ancestors), in Marin Franičević (ed.) *Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti* (Five Centuries of Croatian Literature), vol. 113 (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1976), p. 89. Original verses: *I često, kad u noći ležim/Osjetim silnu čežnju da bježim./Kud – neka slučaj odredi smjer:/To u meni pjeva zanosom svježim/Stari, mrtvi deserter./I pjeva i pjeva os lobodi/Bez granica/I kako su ljepše velike šume/Od oranica,/I kako je lijepo, i kako je ludo/-Hej!-/Rastrgati rudo.*

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