

**COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS –  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE WAR-VETERANS  
PROTESTS IN CROATIA 2012 - 2014**

By

Kristina Uzelac

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Jean-Louis Fabiani

Assit. Prof. Dr. Vlad Naumescu

Budapest, Hungary

June, 2015

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the war-veterans movement in Croatia in the period between 2012 and 2014. It analyzes how the members of the war-veterans and war-victims civic initiative *The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar* managed to gain the public support by framing their claims through the nationalistic historical lens. It also offers a short insight in the position of the war-veterans in contemporary Croatian society, claiming that their societal position and the financial resources they are entitled to as the war-veterans enabled them to engage in a severe political conflict with the central-left Government that is currently in power. The contact point between the sphere of collective memory and social movement is found through the framing approach developed by David Snow (1986, 2004). Thesis is based on an ethnographic research which provided material for demonstrating how strategies of frame alignment are used in different situations. It includes the public dialogue in the form of the concrete collective actions such as protests or commemoration and the ideological battle which happened on the more discursive level.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis comes as a result of an inspiring academic environment of CEU and particularly on the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. It includes all professors from the Department whose classes I had the opportunity to attend. This refers especially on the lectures given by prof. Jean Louis Fabiani who deepened my knowledge and interest in the field of social movements and sociological theory. I am also grateful to Assistant Professor Vlad Naumescu with whom I discovered the beauty of the ethnographic research. I also express my gratitude to Assistant Professor Dorit Geva for her insightful comments.

The great thanks goes also to my professor Nevena Škrbić Alempijević from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb who supported my initial idea for applying at CEU.

This intensive program would not have been the same without my colleagues and friends with whom I shared my stressful moments but even more, my moments of pleasure.

Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my little sister Martina who was always there for me.

# Table of contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
List of Abbreviations.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Contested History and the Position of War-Veterans in the Society – What is Behind War-Veterans Movement in Croatia? .....	1
Purpose Statement and Methodological Observations .....	5
1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – Framing Approach in Social Movement Theory and Collective Memory.....	8
1.1. The Framing Perspective Inside Social Movement Theory .....	8
1.2. Collective Memory – Power Relations in Interpreting the History .....	13
2 EMPIRICAL CHAPTER .....	18
2.1. The Meaning of Vukovar for the Homeland War .....	18
2.2. How and When Collective action Started?.....	19
2.3. ‘Oh Croatia Our Mother, do not grieve...call, just call, all the hawks will give their life for you!’ – Selecting the History and Deploying Collective Memory: Framing the True Croatian Identity .....	23
2.4. The Memory Column – Frame Alignment .....	29
2.5. ‘ <i>Vukovar as a place of special piety</i> ’ – Different Interpretation of Success .....	32
GENERAL CONCLUSION .....	36
REFERENCES .....	39

## **List of Abbreviations**

JNA – Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija/ Yugoslav People's Army

The HQ – The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar

NDH – Nezavisna Država Hrvatska/ Independent State of Croatia

SFRJ – Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija/ Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

# INTRODUCTION

## **Contested History and the Position of War-Veterans in the Society – What is Behind War-Veterans Movement in Croatia?**

During the twentieth century history Croats experienced three wars and lived in six different political communities. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the First World War, Croatia was part of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Austria – Hungarian Empire. After the war, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed which changed the name to Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1931. Eight years later Croats managed to negotiate a special status inside this Kingdom. The final outcome of these negotiations was the establishment of the autonomous Banovina/Banate of Croatia. The new change came on April 10, 1941 when the Nazi puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska/NDH*) was created. The NDH regime introduced anti-semitic laws and started the campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide against Serbs and Roma. As part of the Axis powers, NDH was defeated in the Second World War and after that, the fascist regime was replaced with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija/ SFRJ*). The socialist federation included six socialist republics – Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia and two autonomous provinces> Kosovo and Vojvodina. The socialist politics of *brotherhood and unity* officially ended in 1992, foreshadowing the war, in Croatia called Homeland war (War for Independence). The Croatia won its independence after the five years of war between the Federative Republic of Croatia and the Federative Republic of Serbia<sup>1</sup> in which

---

<sup>1</sup> The Federative Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was also included in this war, but here we are focusing only on the role of the Battle for Vukovar in which Serbian and Croatian forces participated. For wider context of this conflict see for example volume (2001) *The War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1991 – 1995*, Branka

newly established Croatian defense system<sup>2</sup> defeated the Yugoslav People's Army controlled by Serbs and supported by local Serbian paramilitary forces.

These turbulent shifts between various political and ideological polities were always followed by *the invention of traditions* (Hobsbawm 1992) and rearrangements in the sphere of collective memory where the images and readings of the past are adapted to legitimize and support the newly formed social order (Connerton 1989). In order to achieve this, social actors were deploying the variety of strategies on the different levels in the society from implementing new school curriculums (Ugrešić 1998, Koulouri 2002) to the direct interruption in the spatiality of everyday life by changing the street names (Rihtman Auguštin 2001, Docea 2010, Azaryahu 1986). This twentieth century dynamic of forgetting and remembering has created the contested field of national collective memory in which manifests itself in the current discussion about the meanings of the Homeland war between representatives of political right and the political left. The main representatives of this discussion in the public sphere of contemporary Croatia are Homeland war-veterans as an embodiment of the nationalist political spectrum and left-centered Government, which is denounced as a remnant of the former communist (meaning anti Croatian) regime.

The legal position on the war-veterans, or Croatian defenders (literal translation from Croatian word *branitelji*) is regulated through a variety of legal documents of which the most important one is the Act on the Rights of Croatian Defenders from the Homeland war (561-01/12-

---

Magaš and Ivo Žanić, eds. London; Portland OR: Frank Cass. This book is outcome of a conference on the same topic which was held at the Central European University in Budapest in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the Homeland war, Croatia did not have developed defense system because this issue was regulated on the level of the federation with the existence of Yugoslav People's Army, a centrally directed system of defense. As it is stated before, Yugoslav Army was under the Serbian control so in the first few months of the war Croatian Police served as main force of defense, until Croatian National Guard (*Zbor narodne garde*) is established which is later transformed in the Croatian Army under the command of the newly formed Ministry of the Defense. Apart from that, different paramilitary forms also existed - organized for example in local units or by some political party.

01/02, 2013). This Act provides the general information for defining the criteria for receiving the benefits on behalf of having the war-veteran status.<sup>3</sup> According to this Act, Croatian defender is a person who participated (as a volunteer or as a member of Croatian armed forces) in the defense of Croatian “independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty” (The Act on the Rights of Croatian Defenders from the Homeland war 561-01/12-01/02) in the period from 5 August 1990 till 30 June 1996<sup>4</sup>. The ones who received this status gained the rights for the variety of social benefits. But, right to legal privileges did not mean immediate recognition for their *heroic* deeds from the whole society. On the contrary, the problem of *lažnih branitelj/ false defenders* – people who got the veteran status and right to benefits without participating in the war- created an atmosphere in which veterans are mostly considered as a social group that undeservedly enjoys the variety of social privileges. This atmosphere enhanced the feeling of alienation and marginalization among the war-veterans who became fragmented (Lea 2015). *The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar* (in further text ‘the HQ’) initiative was one of the first successful attempts to unite the war-veteran population all around the country for the purpose of protecting the Vukovar as a *place of piety*.

The process of civic re-socialization (Begić, Sanader and Žunec 2007) of war veterans who returned from the battlefield is well known in the literature (Correia 2012, Werther and Hurd 2014, Žunec 1998, 2006, Nicosia 2002). After the war, veterans found themselves in the position to reclaim their honorable status in the Croatian society which started an intensive transition between two different socioeconomic –political systems, from socialism to liberal democracy. Before the

---

<sup>3</sup> It is important to emphasize that the term war-veteran and even more Croatian defenders is referring only to those who participated in the Homeland war. The rights of the Second World War veterans are regulated with other legal acts.

<sup>4</sup>The volunteer status is granted to those who participated in the battle for at least 30 or 100 days. The minimum for the defender status is five months.

war ended, The Association of Patriotic War Volunteers and Veterans Republic of Croatia (*Udruga dragovoljaca i veteran Domovinskog rata Republike Hrvatske*, UHVDR) announced the Declaration on Homeland War Veterans (1994) in which they are portrayed as “protectors and bearers of particular social interests with the will to lead their realization” (Begić, Sanader and Žunec 2007:10). Instead of expected glory, veterans faced the cruel reality of unemployment, material insecurity, carelessness and indifference. The first reaction as a result of their disappointment followed two years after, in 1996, when the same association – UHVDR-a initiated the petitioning to the Government to accept fifteen *fundamental claims* that will improve their position in the society (Begić, Sanader and Žunec 2007:10). These claims are not publicly available, but according to sources (Begić, Sanader and Žunec 2007) they caused the short but intensive political conflict between the war-veterans and the former President Franjo Tuđman who is now idealized as a main protector of the war veterans dignity. Today, almost 20 years after, the discrepancy between the social status war-veterans wanted for themselves, and one recognized by the society is almost the same. The constant struggle between imagined and received recognition is one of the fundamental parts of the war veterans rhetoric in Croatia. By focusing on war- veterans as a special social group with great merits for the independence of Croatia, this research has the goal to expand the volume of literature written on social movements from the perspective of this particular group where war-veterans are observed as active actors in the political sphere. How they deploy their experience and specific position in the society as a source of legitimation for starting a war-veteran movement in Croatia 2013. .

The important moment in the war-veterans rhetoric is the constant reflection on the past historical events which makes them embedded in the sphere of collective memory. The suggested definition for the collective memory in the context of this research is one written by Astrid Erll (2008). She defined it as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural context” (Erll 2008:2).

The discrepancy between their interpretation of the symbolism of particular events and the official one represented in the left-centered Government resulted in a series of collective actions organized in the period between 2012 and 2014 by the war-veterans and war-victims civic initiative *The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar*. Following Tilly's definition that social movements are "collectively expressed grievances to a perceived social problem or reactively to a threatened change to a way of life" (Tilly in King and Soule 2007:414), these war-veterans actions are characterized as part of the war-veterans social movement in Croatia whose main actions are focused on the protection and preservation of a particular image and version of history. Because of the intensive political dynamic in the twentieth century Croatian history, every dialogue about particular events is burdened with the ideological background of the involved social actors. The dialogue is framed in constant negotiation between the political right – *nationalists* and political left- *communists/socialists*.

### **Purpose Statement and Methodological Observations**

This thesis is based on the ethnographic research conducted between 2013 and 2015. It includes participant observation with recorded interviews and conversations with supporters and the members of the above mentioned civic initiative. The main fieldwork was done in April 2015 with previous visits to the field in April and November 2013. Other used sources include the newspaper reports, the official HQ's Facebook and Internet webpage were used as important source of information for following the movement's dynamic. My personal and family connections were the main entry point for this research and as such they figured as a *push-pull* factors in the realization of this inquiry. Following Narayan's (1993) shifting identification which pursue the anthropologist when doing her fieldwork and ethnography, the main challenge in this research was how to combine the different types of "belonging to the world of engaged scholarship and the world

of everyday life (1993:872), i. e. private, family life. After I left my hometown and my field for the purpose of studying abroad, my position changed from *being native* to *being foreigner*. Therefore my research position was biased because of personal closeness with my subjects which sometimes collided with the professional, academic interests. This problem was solved through conversations with my colleagues and professors, I hope for the right way. Nevertheless, this method is seen as optimal one because it allows the researcher the opportunity to access micro-level of the movement and collect the wide variety of different narrations which create the palimpsest of collective memory inscribed in the particular space, time, identity and law.

The main aim of this research is to offer an interpretation of the 2013 war-veterans protest headed by The HQ through the perspectives opened with two bodies of literature – one on the collective memory and the other on social movements. It tries to explain how trauma and victimhood seen as elements of the collective memory discourse, are politicized in the process of mobilizing people for the particular social movement. The realm of collective memory about the recent war experience in the Croatian context will be related to the theories about social movements, because memory serves as the source of justification for social actions of particular social group gathered under the HQ's initiative. The discrepancy between the two different imaginaries on national history and the fundamental values of Croatian identity figures as the impetus for divisions inside society, where enemies and allies are proclaimed based on the fluid criteria of imagined ideal of *Croatianhood*. The relationship between the collective memory and development of the war-veteran social movement in Croatia will be demonstrated through three dimensions around which the HQ's protest activities were organized and strategically framed (Snow et al 1986). The first part of the empirical analysis is dedicated to narrations about the *true Croatian identity*, which is supported by ethnographic material collected through interviews with the HQ members and supporters who participated on the protests and participant observation

(which included the presence on two major protest organized by the HQ in Vukovar and Zagreb in 2013). The second part is a discussion about the spatial element of collective memory which includes different discourses regarding the role and memory on the particular town, Vukovar, in the context of the Homeland war and current politics. The third part is an attempt to reflect on the potential which law has as a part of the social movement repertoire in leading “battles over the meaning of the past” (Loytomaki 2012:3).

# **1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – Framing Approach in Social Movement Theory and Collective Memory**

The following theoretical background is imagined as a discussion on main concepts and approaches on which the further interpretation of the collected empirical material will be based. From here it is obvious that this thesis is not imagined as a grounded theory project but as a constant process of interaction between empirical material and theoretical tools with which particular knowledge is placed inside the micro-context of the subject of inquiry. The first part of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion on the position and elements of the framing perspective inside the field social movement theory. This perspective is chosen because it offers necessary analytical tools for seizing discursive and ideological aspects of this movement. The second part is about collective memory and possible phenomena through which it manifests as a fluid social construction inside particular time and space frame.

## **1.1. The Framing Perspective Inside the Social Movement Theory**

The syntagm *social movement* was, according to Haberle (1951) used for the first time by German writer Lorenz von Stein <sup>5</sup> in his writings about the development of the proletarian movement (4). Since then this phenomenon represents the proliferate area of social inquiry influenced by wider changes in general sociological theory. The differences between approaches are mostly based on the entry points they use for developing their analysis such as collective action (Olson 1965), the resource-mobilization system (McCarthy and Zald 2001) of a particular

---

<sup>5</sup> Haberle, Rudolf “Social Movements. An introduction to political sociology”, 1951: 4

movement, the opportunity structures (Kurzman 1996), identity and the dynamics of contentions (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). One of the most recent attempts to “break the theoretical ground” (Opp 2009: 230) inside the field of social movements is the framing approach. Each one of these approaches can be used as a starting point for detecting the causal relations inside the Croatian war-veterans movement, but the main entry point for discussion in this thesis is the framing perspective represented in the works of David Snow (2004, Snow et al 2004) and Robert Benford (Benford, Snow et al 1986, Opp 2009).

The framing approach is offered as an extension of the resource mobilization perspective and as a contribution to the aspect of social movements neglected by other theories, especially the issue regarding the dynamic of participation. As Opp (2009) pointed out, the major question of the framing approach is “when the arguments that social movements articulate are accepted by unmobilized individuals (or other third parties)” (234). The starting point of this approach is Erving Goffman’s *Frame analysis* (1974) from where Snow et al borrowed the definition which is fundamental for their elaboration on the *frame alignment* process (Snow et al 1986:464). The fundamental concept of *frame* is explained as the “‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify and label’ occurrences within their life space and world at large...by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al 1986:464). These *schemata* are crucial for frame alignment which refers to “the linkage of individual and SMO<sup>6</sup> interpretative orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary” (Snow et al 1986:464). One of the aims behind this approach is to connect the micro and macro level of analysis, namely to link “social psychological

---

<sup>6</sup> Social movement organization – SMO.

and structural/organizational factors perspectives in a theoretically informed and empirically grounded fashion” (Snow et al 1986:464).

The connection between micro and macro level in the process of participation and mobilization is even more emphasized in Opp’s (2009) reading of frame (alignment). The author defined it as “a mental model which consists of cognitive elements” (235). With this deeper insight into the cognitive sphere, Opp related the process of participation and frame building with the general idea how people are organizing their experience and their belief system which is deeply embedded in “everything that an individual has stored in his or her memory” (Opp 2009:234). From there we can observe how collectively represented memory on the particular events resonates with the individual experience stored in the sphere of personal memory.

Snow et al (1986) operationalized the frame alignment process with three conceptual tools with which the dynamic of participation inside social movements can be analyzed. The first element is called frame amplification and refers to “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretative frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events” (469). It includes two tactics – value amplification and belief amplification. It is suggested that members of social movements organization are using the suitable value and belief systems in order to support and justify their claims. The values relevant for the issue are being reinvigorated and idealized as for example praising the values of traditional family, nationhood, heroic history (battles, history figures), democracy and political neutrality (when talking about state institutions in the case of Croatia). Values are supported with general, commonsensical beliefs, which are emphasized in the process of explaining objectives. Those are often stereotypical beliefs about the antagonists of social movements which are (most of the time) not invented for the purposes of the particular agenda, but selected from the already existing repertoire of, for example, *old enemies* (communists, Serbs).

Frame amplification can be considered as a starting point in spreading the movement's agenda in order to encourage potential supporters to participate in future events. The other two, frame extension and frame transformation, are more about the dynamic between the social movement's organization and the public. When the movement already started, it can change its course by "attempting to enlarge its adherent pool by portraying its objectives and activities as attending to or being congruent with the values or interests of potential adherents" (472). This mechanism of frame extension can include the engagement of a particular singer or a band, same as important political or social figure (for example in Croatia, recently released generals who are perceived as heroes) which will attract people to come to protest or other forms of gatherings (commemorations). It can also be realized through different changes in formulating and presenting the cause of collective, for example, expanding the problematic from local to the national level (local national minority problem as a manifestation of national politics).

The last tool for re-directing the trajectory of the movement is frame transformation. This concept is closely connected with Goffman's idea of keying, namely signifying the transformation of "meanings into something patterned on but independent of the initial frame" (Fine and Manning 2003:54). The transformation can happen on two levels – the domain-specific and the global interpretative frame while both "involve a reframing of some set of conditions, be they biographic or social past, present, or future, 'change in the perceived seriousness of the condition'" (Snow et al 1986:475). The domain-specific is often found in the movements that seek to alter the status of a category of people such as children, women or war-veterans who are trying to "reclaim [their] history and identity" (Snow et al 1986:475). The global domain represents the extension of a particular frame to other groups in the society or other strategic levels of action.

The above described tools will be used for the analysis of the general dynamic rise and decline of the war- veteran movement in Croatia represented in the collective actions organized by

the HQ. This does not imply that they are treated as perfectly clear completely elaborated. One issue that is still missing in this approach is the more material aspect of decision making process - how is decision related to the availability of resources (material and nonmaterial)? The position of war-veterans in the Croatian society can serve as an example. One of the critiques directed towards resource mobilization theory is that it presuppose the omnipresence of the grievance that can “supply the grass-roots support for a movement” (Snow 2004:382) in any society. It is not to say that grievances are not important – completely the opposite is suggested by Snow (2004). He argued that it matters but the grievance cannot be interpreted in a neutral and objective way because “history is replete with examples of aggregations of individuals who are deprived relative to their neighbors, who are exploited economically...but who have not mobilized in order to collectively challenge the appropriate authorities regarding their situation” (Snow 2004:382). While the framing approach goes more into discursive and ideological level of analysis, resource-mobilization theory reminds us also on the material status of individuals. The grievances of war-veterans in the society are not a result of their bad material conditions – at least of ones who are main protagonists in these protests. On the contrary, the system of social benefits which is granted places them in the position of stabile middle class of Croatian society. During years these privileges are changed together with the criteria how to entitle the right to them. In the list of the privileges they (rightfully) enjoy, two are maybe crucial – financial security and time. The first refers to the stable source of income (for those who are in the state pension system) and time as a sub sequential consequence of their retirement status. So, in this case, material conditions of movement protagonists is not the cause of their grievances. The source lays in the perceived threat of *old/new* enemies to the value system they represent.

The notion of *old/new* enemies brought us to the second part of this theoretical chapter which is dedicated to the issue of collective memory which, in the context of this social movement,

serves as a well from which tools for framing alignment through amplification, transformation and extension are extracted.

## **1.2. Collective Memory – Power Relations in Interpreting the History**

Collective memory is an important part of group and individual identity. It does not refer to the some past events that are resting in the neutral and far away history. The observed events are considered to be intensively embedded in the present and contemporary society; in the temporal and spatial context in which narrations about the past are created. Further one, the collective memory is a construction, a never-ending process in which members of the particular social group select fragments from past, re-interpret them and use them for building the collective identity. Although it is a transdisciplinary phenomena (Erl1 2008), it has a special position inside the field of ethnography and anthropology because we are searching for and collecting people's life stories and histories (Svensson 1995) which are the result of the constant interplay between the past and present or in simple terms – the process of making sense of the past in the present. This idea is present since the early beginning when the concept itself was coined by Maurice Halbwachs in his study on the *memorie collective* (1925, with the English translation in 1992). In the preface of *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs (1992:40) elaborated on the constructivist nature of the collective (social) memory by stating that “in reality the past does not recur as such, that everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present”. This reconstruction happens inside the collective frameworks defined as “the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society” (Halbwachs 1992: 41).

This sort of vague definition can be better understood if operationalized through the social practice as Connerton (1989) suggested. His answer to the question – *how societies remember?* lays in the sphere of the commemorative ceremonies and following bodily practices (1989). These performative elements of social life represent different levels of the experience through which the collective memory<sup>7</sup> is manifested. In that sense, the term collective should not be taken for granted. The *collective memory* in itself does not exist. What exists are individual practices through which the negotiation between collective and individual is negotiated. Individuals and subjects are bearers but “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories...they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 1992:38). The following conclusion is that it is a permanent dialectic between these levels in the society. The dialectic which is sensitive to the cultural and social environment.

Therefore, the research on memory should take into consideration these different levels from micro perspective (for example everyday life practice of individuals), along meso-level studies of social groups (group leading the social movement) and macro level (historical processes and rhetorical competition) because “[e]ach level of analysis focuses attention on distinct social locations where memory is studied and draws attention to unique process whereby movements create and use collective memory” (Kubal and Becerra 2014:866). One of the strategies used on different levels for mobilizing the past in order to influence the future and interpret present, is “perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting” (Assman 2008:97). These complementary processes are part of social normality. What makes them especially interesting are

---

<sup>7</sup> Connerton used the term *social memory*. It is worth mentioning that variety of names used in this field, create challenges for those who are searching for a general conceptual foundation in the field. Some of used syntagms are: social frameworks of memory, *mnemosyne*, *ars memorie*, communicative memory and so on. I decided to accept the concept of collective memory, following the terminology used in the volume *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008), edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning.

two forms in which they can be appear – more passive or more active one (Assman 2008). The active form of forgetting is “implied in intentional acts such as trashing and destroying...[they] are necessary and constructive part of internal social transformations; they are, however, violently destructive when directed at an alien culture or a persecuted minority” (Assman 2008:97-98). The passive form is “related to non-institutional acts such as losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning, or leaving something behind” (Assman 2008:98). When it comes to remembering, Assman (2008:98) also differentiated two institutions – active memory that preserve *past as present* and passive memory that preserve *past as past*. First one can be referred further on as a *canon*, and latter *archive* (Assman 2008:98). All these strategies include the process of selection – what will be activated from the past and how would it be done? Final result of selection is set of ideas and interpretations that “enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity)...related to time” (Assman J. 2008: 109).

Other author who focused the research on memory to more *materialized* forms is Pierre Nora with his concept of *lieux de mémoire*. The construction of this term is based on Nora’s analysis of the French history. In the seven toms published in between 1981-1992 he analyzed how history was used in the process of constructing French national identity and nationalism, especially the role of the French revolution imaginary. The relationship between history and memory is discussed in the introduction to published volumes, titled *Between Memory and History: Le Lieux de Mémoire* (1989). Nora sees them to be in “fundamental opposition”. On the other hand, Halbwachs sees them as interdependent where history serves as an extension for collective memory – the history starts where the memory ends (1992). Also, they conceived the history in a different way. For Halbwachs depicted history as a singular, objective and neutral as opposite to various versions of the collective memory, and Nora described it as “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” (1998:8).

within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again...Memory is blind to all but the group it binds...there are as many memories as there are groups, ...memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History on the other hand belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to empirical continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative (1998: 8-9)

The distinction between memory and history is sometimes explained with the distinction between *das Gedächtnis* and *die Erinnerung*, or in Croatian language *pamćenje* and *sjećanje*. The English translation for both terms are translated is the same - memory, but in Croatian there is an important distinction between them. *Die Erinnerung* or *sjećanje* refers more to memory based on the individual and subjective experience, the live story and live history (Svensson 1995), whilst *das Gedächtnis* or *pamćenje* refers to the memory supported with the facts, often presented as part of an objective historical knowledge and the official history. This division is important for the further analysis in the empirical chapter, because it allows more nuances than is allowed if only opposition history and memory is used.

The above presented discussion was introduced with Nora's text on the *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory (Winter 2008, Hebel 2008, Le Rider 2008). The sites are "fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it" which include "history's most elementary tools and ...the most symbolic objects of our memory" (Nora 1992: 12) such as archives, libraries, dictionaries, museums, sanctuaries, and the social practices as commemorations, celebrations, festivals, anniversaries, rituals, and also protests. In the chapter that follows I will focus on the practices which were part

of the war-veterans movements repertoire and in the same time, they served as an entry point – *vectors* of memory (Wood 1999) for getting behind the obvious and hidden ideological agenda.

## 2 EMPIRICAL CHAPTER

### 2.1. The Meaning of Vukovar for the Homeland War

Vukovar is the town in the Eastern part of Croatia, placed on the western part of the Danube river bank which serves as a natural border between the Republic of Croatia and Republic of Serbia. With its population of around 26 000 inhabitants, it can be considered as a mid-size Croatian town. During the Homeland war it was an important strategic point for Yugoslav People's Army at least for three reasons. First one is the fact that it was the town with higher percentage of Serbians – around 37% in 1991, and 42% Croats, so the JNA counted on the support of local Serbs (not just from the town but also from surrounding villages). The second reason was its geostrategic position. The town was very close to the border so it will be easier to transport necessary resources (army and artillery) from headquarters in Serbia (Belgrade) to the town. The third one, connected with the previous is its connection with other big cities in the region (such as Vinkovci and Osijek), so the “capture of Vukovar was part of Belgrade's plan to seize other cities in the region...and to penetrate even further in order to link up with Serb forces deployed in Western Slavonia” (Serbetovsky 2002:7). The battle for Vukovar was fought from May<sup>8</sup> till November 1991. From the military-political perspective, this *fortious* battle was crucial one which decided the future steps in this conflict (Špegelj 2001:35). The Serbian forces tactical won the battle and the town fell on 19 November 1991, while some parts of the town surrendered day before, on 18 November. On 20 September, following the seize of the town, the Ovčara massacre happened. The massacre refers

---

<sup>8</sup> On May 1 first twelve Croatian policemen were ambushed and killed in the part of the town called Borovo Selo, with Serbian majority. These are not first victims in this war. First armed clash between the Serbian and Croatian forces (civilians mostly) happened during on 31 March 1991 (so called *Bloody Easter*) at the Plitvice Lake where Croatian police officer - Josip Jović – was killed. Some of my informants stated that for them, the battle for Vukovar started even before that when they joined to the unofficial local units which were formed as a sort of local/neighborhood watch.

to the assassination of around 260 people (wounded civilians and soldiers, female and male, not just Croats but Serbs who were defending the city, Bosniaks, one French and one German soldier) who were captured from the Vukovar's hospital and transported to the Ovčara farm<sup>9</sup> (turned into prison camp for transporting the war captives to the prison in Sremska Mrtovica) where they were brutally killed. Every year, on September 18 people gather in Vukovar to commemorate these events with participating in the *Memory Column*. In 2013, few months after first protest regarding bilingual signs started in Vukovar, I participated in the *Column*. Following part of this chapter is based on this fieldwork.

## **2.2. How and When Collective action Started?**

In December 2012, one year after the census data were collected, the Croatian Bureau for Statistics announced the results on population by ethnicity (by towns/municipalities). According to the new census data, in a small town in the Eastern part of Croatia, Vukovar, more than one third of inhabitants declared as ethnic Serbs. According to the State Constitution, and the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities (further Minority Law) as well as the Law on use of Minority Language and Scripts a threshold of one third of a whole population is set for a official use of a minority language in a self-government unit - city, town or county. A prospect of the implementation of this particular minority right, prompted the reaction of small (15 - 35 people) group of the war-veterans, mostly from Vukovar or the nearby villages and cities. One of (then) future steps for the local and the state government, was to place bilingual signs (in Cyrillic and Latin letters) on the state buildings and the other street signs in the town. In order to prevent this

---

<sup>9</sup> During the war Serbian forces imprisoned in between 3000 and 4000 captives. One of the civilians killed in the night from 20/21 September 1991 was reporter Siniša Glavašević.

to happen, because it is seen as an act of symbolic violence against the collective (Croatian) victimhood during the Homeland war in nineties, they had formed civic initiative *The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar*. The main goal of this initiative is to “protect the memory on victimhood” and the city of Vukovar as a *place of piety* by banning bilingual signs from the city’s streets for a certain period of time. The HQ was established on 10 January 2013 in Vukovar as a civic initiative supported by 22 different war-victims associations and around 350 other organizations. Despite the HQ’s efforts to obstruct authorities in their aim to set the bilingual signs, eight months later, in the September of the same year, in the early morning, the first bilingual signs with cyrillic letters were installed on the buildings of the following state institutions – the Police Administration, the Tax Administration, the Public Administration and the Custom House. The reaction was immediate. People gathered in front of the police station where Cyrillic letter sign was placed and one of the HQ member, 74-year old war-veteran who lost two sons during the war in nineties, climbed his friends back and destroyed the sign with a hammer. The *battle* between HQ and the government commenced. More than 20 years after the war was fought, veterans claimed that the town of Vukovar should be defended again. The town started to represent the whole nation and the Croatian identity, perceived as being under threat of non-Croatian politicians (represented in members of the current, left-centred oriented Government) and the state institutions. As it is often mentioned by HQ members and their supporters, because of its suffer during the Homeland war, the town of Vukovar is perceived as ultimate pillar of protection for the remembrance of (Croatian) victimhood.

With the above described actions, intensive two-year period of HQ’ social engagement started and is still ongoing<sup>10</sup>. Short overview of their previous actions and future projects was given

---

<sup>10</sup> On October 20 2014, a group of war-veterans and war-invalids started the protest in front of the War Veteran’s Affair Ministry in Zagreb. The final trigger for this protest, as explained by the organizers was the contentious

during the press conference held in Vukovar on 20 April 2015. Their repertoire includes various tactics and strategies, among which some have more normative and some more pedagogical function. Proposing a referendum through which Constitutional amendment regarding decreasing minority rights would be put in place is an example of normative strategy. Pedagogical one is the system of the public denunciation of the ideological enemies titled as *mental communists*. The idea of *mental communists* is taken from the book title of one of the prominent right wing authors, Ivana Aralica (*Mentalni komunist* 2012, Zagreb: Ljevak). In this book the idea is elaborated on the example of the left-oriented former Croatian president Stjepan Mesić. On the more general level it signifies social actors who are still having communist mentality, or in the simple term, as one of my informants explained – “people who hate everything that is Croatian/ *hrvatsko*, or even startst with C/h”.

In general, their repertoire of contention consists of written projects (such as *Vukovar place of piety/ Vukovar mjesto posebnog pijeteta*), various initiatives (*Mother governess/ Majka odgajateljica*, *Public contract/ Javni ugovor*, *Legal prosecution against the State of Serbia for war reparation/ Podizanje tužbe protiv Srbije za isplatu reparacije*<sup>11</sup>), a public gatherings and protests in Vukovar and Zagreb, cooperation with other associations (by supporting them publicly or through a close coordination in future actions), petitions (on the referendum or to initiate parliamentary debates on particular issues such as discussion about bilingual signs in Vukovar) and public denunciation of *mental communists* (very often referring to the former Croatian presidents Ivo Josipović and Stjepan Mesić) through available media channels. This list of twelve strategic

---

statement given by the one of the minister's advisers. In his speech given during one of the public discussion organized by the NGO organization *Documenta- Center for dealing with the past* he called into question the percentage of the war-veterans who suffer from the PTSP – Posttraumatic Stress Disorder claiming that it is strange since they are granted with the list of social benefits and are winners in the Homeland war.

<sup>11</sup> These information are available at the official webpage - <http://stozerzaobranuhrvatskogvukovara.hr/>.

objectives represents the key points for the future projects and actions. First goal on the list is to protect the city of Vukovar as place of the (permanent) piety. The other 11 objectives encompass wide range of social and political spheres - such as the human rights protection<sup>12</sup> and protection of state's sovereignty by preventing hazardous economic agreements, stabile demographic and national security politics, lustration, changes in electoral legislation, political support for Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and encouraging the return of the Croatian diaspora (where they are seen mainly as potential investors).

These strategic objectives imply their vision of *genuine* Croatian national identity and future projects are focused on creating pressure over the Government to direct their decisions in a way which will enhance state institutions to act in favour of imagined national (cultural, ethnic) markers. The HQ resentment towards Government is depicted in Government's unwillingness to acknowledge and interpret the Vukovar's victimhood in a way the HQ suggested. This figures as one of the perceived grievances (McCarthy and Zald 2002) behind the HQ's social movement. These actions include various forms of cultural performance, defined as "social process by which actors, individually or in concert display for others the meaning of their social situation" (Alexander 2006:32). Performances are framed inside HQ's *logical matrix* (term used by one of the respondents) for defending *Vukovar's Croatia*, i. e. those Croats who had accurately interpreted events with cyrillic signs as attack on the Croatian identity and the collective memory. It is important to notice, that visibility of their claims is even more highlighted by the fact that the majority in the current Parliament and Government belongs to left-centered Social Democratic Party of Croatia (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*, SDP) with coalition partners. In that way,

---

<sup>12</sup> Mostly referring to the case of Veljko Marić who was in 2011 sentenced to 12 years in prison on the charges of committed war crimes against civilians in the Rastovac village during the Homeland war in 1991. Veljko Marić is transferred to serve the rest of his sentence in the Croatian prison in May 2015.

the HQ represents right-wing opposition and serves as catalyst for mobilizing the right-wing electorate for approximate parliamentary elections. HQ performances can be treated as collective actions with clear political ambition induced by perceived social problem and “threatened change to a way of life” (Tilly acc. King and Soule 2007:414). Through their utterances - TV, social media, webpage, protest speeches and other forms of public representation, they constructed particular social reality around the idea of victimhood and *defense* which creates adequate frame for legitimization. From the very beginning, when first bilingual signs were destroyed, HQ was signified as ultimate defense force whose members have nothing to lose in this *battle* with the Government for *Croatian Vukovar*. This picture is embodied in the victimhood of Marijan Živković, one of the oldest members of HQ whose absolute victim for Croatian independence (as it is mentioned he lost two sons during the war and is a war veteran himself) cannot be compensated with false promises and political games for war-veteran benefits, but with the righteous and honest fight for preserving the memory on his son’s heroic death by keeping bilingual signs - the representation of the Serbian hegemony- out of this heroic town. However, this symbolic position of the uncompromised, ultimate defenders is deeply threatened by HQ political engagement with the Croatian political right wing.

### **2.3. ‘Oh Croatia Our Mother, do not grieve...call, just call, all the hawks will give their life for you!’<sup>13</sup> – Selecting the History and Deploying Collective Memory: Framing the True Croatian Identity**

---

<sup>13</sup> This is the famous verse from the well-known nationalist song which is often performed in the various events with nationalistic connotations. The interesting story behind is that there is almost the same version in Serbian in which *the Serbian Mother* is evoked.

On the cold day in the end of April 2013, around 40 000<sup>14</sup> people gathered on the main square in Croatian capital Zagreb. The war veterans and other supporters came, invited by HQ, to protest on the issue of the bilingual signs in Vukovar. The square where it happened is not just important because it is the main square in the Capital of *all Croats*, but because of the historical figure after which it was named<sup>15</sup>. It is called after the famous Croatian Ban Josip Jelačić, 19<sup>th</sup> century hero who fought against Hungarians and prevented them to invade Croatian parts across the Drava river. This interpretation of Jelačić's historical importance is accepted and shared by the HQ members<sup>16</sup>. His role as a great military leader was mentioned during the protest in short historical overview of important Croats in the history given by historian and communicologists, Ante Nadomir Tadić Šutra

Here we are at the main square, the Capital of all Croats...we had our heroines and heroes...our dukes, kings, generals, knights and bans, and one of them is one on whose square we are today, ban Josip Jelačić who dared to say to Hungarian hegemony: 'It's enough, if you don't accept us as equal members of the empire, we will cross the Drava river!'. And he went and he won, same as we did (*in Homeland war in nineties, i.e.*) (excerpt from the given speech)

Jelačić's is used as role model for defending what is sacred for Croatian people – their identity and their land. The whole program was a mixture of the speeches and music with extreme nationalistic discourse. The fundamental elements of right-wing imagined Croatian identity were presented and amplified in this one and a half long program. It started with the radio reports from

---

<sup>14</sup> These are estimates given by the members of the HQ. According to the official police record, around 20 000 people gathered on the square.

<sup>15</sup> This square was renamed after the Independence. During the Yugoslav period, before nineties, it was officially called The Republic Square. The statue of the ban Josip Jelačić was removed during that period because of its symbolic inside the Croatian national imaginarium. It was placed back in 1990.

<sup>16</sup> There are still debates about his role in defending Croatin interests inside Austro-Hungarian empire. Some argue that he was serving Austriran cort then Croatian interests, for others he is personification of ideal Croatian political figure. But in any case, he is also remembered for his abolition of serfdom in Croatia in 1848. For debates about Jelačić's historical position inside Croatian national history see for example – Rihtman Auguštin, D. (2000) *Ulice moga grada*. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek

Vukovar during the siege in 1991. These reports were made by the chief editor of the Radio Vukovar, Siniša Glavašević who was (few days before the Croatian generals capitulated) pleading the President Franjo Tuđman and the rest of the country to send help to the soldiers in Vukovar because they were close to losing the battle. His reports are still important testimonies and reminders on the tragedy which happened in the middle of November 1991 to more than 30 000 people, civilians and soldiers who were left in the town<sup>17</sup> and as such serves as an tool for amplifying the frame in which the HQ's claims are justified. Although offered the chance to leave the town when it was obvious that the battle is lost, Siniša stayed in his town till the end and was killed by Serbian paramilitary troops at the Ovčara.

Another important actors in protecting and creating the imagined Croatian identity are priests and monks. After Siniša's radio reports and greetings with introduction words given by the host, well known right oriented journalist and TV presenter Velimir Bujanec, the Croatian anthem was played and followed by the moment of silence for missing war-veterans. Except of the Croatian anthem, the other songs well known in the nationalistic and patriotic discourse were performed during the protest by the two singers, who both started their career during or immediately after the war<sup>18</sup>. The blessing was given by the Franciscan monk Ante Perković. Pater<sup>19</sup> Perković addressed the audience with a welcome phrase considered to be Croatian tradition among religious people—*Hvaljen Isus i Marija!// Praised be Jesus and Maria* and they responded – *Navjeke!// Now (and) forever!* After short speech about his experience in the Serbian camp and his efforts to reconstruct

---

<sup>17</sup> A documentary „Siniša Glavašević – Zaustavljeni glas/ Siniša Glavašević – Silenced voice“ about his reports and the situation in the redaction of Croatian radio – Vukovar is made in 2010 (directed by Višnja Starešina, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_vlwBeR-OXU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vlwBeR-OXU)).

<sup>18</sup> The first song performed by singer Stanko Šarić was *Iznad polja makova/ Beyond the Poppy Fields*. The song is about still missing war-veterans who will always live in in our memories. This was very emotional moment for me as a researcher because as a child, with my sisters, hiding in the basement during the war in my hometown we were singing this song very often.

<sup>19</sup> From Latin word *pater* meaning father.

the parish in the Vukovar, he started the blessing with the prayer (*Očenaš/ Our father, who art in Heaven!* and *Zdravo Marijo/ Hail Mary*). There are at least two levels of symbolism in his speech. First one is explicit and other one more sublime. The Cyrillic letters in the town of Vukovar are metaphor for the “further aggression and hegemonic will to conquer this land” (Pater Perković). In ‘90s these letters came to town “on tanks and because of that they are a symbol of war and destruction” (Tomislav Josić, HQ’s president). Both of them, the head of HQ and pater Perković were imprisoned during the Homeland war by Serbian army and spent time in Serbian paramilitary camps. For the prisoners who were tortured for days (some months) the Cyrillic letters are also reminders on the experienced trauma. As one of informants told me, the Serbian and Yugoslav soldiers in one of the investigation prisons in Petrovaradin, while beating him were threatening that “after you go out of here, you will forget Latin letters, only Cyrillic... Vukovar is Serbian town and it shall be like that forever” (B. G.) The same letters were sometimes used also as a marker for crimes committed against women during the Homeland war. The other war-veteran and prisoner, was raped by members of Serbian paramilitary officers in her house in Vukovar. For her the Cyrillic letters are the reminder of her personal story because, before leaving, officers draw outline of Serbian national coat of arm<sup>20</sup>, on her house façade as mark that “this house is conquered”<sup>21</sup> (M.).

Second message sent by pater Perković was about general position of Croatian veterans in the relationship to, not just Serbs, but enemies in general. This is the notion of patient, righteous and tolerant Croats who are not aggressive and will never attack someone first, but are always ready to defend what is *theirs/ Croat* (Schäuble 2014). This agenda is consisted in often quoted verse from one of the Croatian (Serbian born) 19<sup>th</sup> century poet Petar Preradović (inspired with

<sup>20</sup> Cross with four S, in Cyrillic letters four C – meaning *Samo Sloga Srbina Spašava/ Only Unity Saves the Serbs*.

<sup>21</sup> The problem of civil victims in Homeland war is still not solved in Croatia. One of my informants still meets her rapist who is living in Vukovar.

national romanticism) from his poem *Rodu o jeziku/ To my kin, concerning the language* –“respect the others, by be the proud of yours”. Religion and family as fundamental and idealized values of Croatian identity are treated as sacred and worth fighting for. At the same time, they are also main motivation for defending values which are perceived as under threat

In the history, Croatian *narod/ nation* ...you know, *Dalmatino povišću pritrujena/ Dalmatia, Worn Out by History*...found itself in a very difficult, hardly imaginable political situations. During these, let's say, a subtle times without any access to media (as is the case now), it was even harder to get along...but the *narod/* people managed to get through every time...nevertheless we paid very high price for that, but we survived. Why? Because of the great belief in our God and traditional affinity for family...you know that, *it is better if village disappears than if customs disappear*, right? That's what motivated people through all these tough times and if they (*mental communists* represented in the current left- centered Government, i. e.) destroy that now – and they are rushing exactly against these values...It means some national values which are not the question related to individuals – and that is why they are forcing the issue of individuals. Individual rights should be respected, of course, but individual without his roots, like a tree without its roots can hardly rest. There are some people whose roots are very widely spread, and they called themselves *Jugoslaveni/ Yugoslavs*. Eee, they, instead of using their roots for something affirmative, because it is more widely spread then the roots of us who are calling ourselves Croats, unfortunately, they are using it in a very destructive way... (Ž. M., HQ member)

Pater Perković was succeeded by the president of the HQ who, by playing with the words while greeting the people, evoked the extreme-right, Croatian fascist politics during the Second World War. Namely, he used the word *Bok* which is used as informal greeting and when pronounced sounds like *Bog* meaning God in Croatian language. In the combination with the word Croats – *Bog/God and the Croats/ Bok/g Hrvati* – it resembles the famous Croatian dictum said by Croatian writer and *father of Croatian nation* Ante Starčević in his speech given to the Croatian Parliament in 1861 which was later used as an official greeting among the army of fascist Independent State of Croatia (lasted from 1941 – 1945, during the Second World War). The flirting with fascist heritage is one of the markers of their discourse. In public it can be covertly read, in between the lines, what demands from the audience and potential supporters to share particular

knowledge about particular interpretations of history and political events<sup>22</sup>. Josić invited people to behave decent “and not to give more materials for those who are trying to ruing the dignity of Croatian war-veterans by depicting them as bad people, gamblers, sitting in the bar, beating his wife, causing problems” (Josić). The point is to show to *them* that war-veterans are capable of organizing peaceful protests with dignity and use democratic ways for solving problems in the society, being at the same time “the only ones who are always ready to give their lives for their Homeland” (Josić).

In the context of the cycles of contention of the HQ social movement, this event, together with the Vukovar’s Memory Column in 2013 (more in the next subchapter), figures as a moment of the highest stage of frame alignment (Snow et al 1986). The HQ leader, Tomislav Josić, presented this gathering as a reminder and a demonstration of the potential mobilization power which is behind them. He amplified their message by explicitly showing the whole repertoire of the beliefs and values. By seizing in the sphere of national history he directly evoked historical figures to support the process of the identity construction, or in their words – *identity reconstruction*. The memory on the past events, is supported with explicit facts about missing persons and the unsolved Serbian war-crimes (*pamćenje*) but also by extending the narration in the emotional and personal sphere through personal testimonies which some of the speakers shared with the audience. As almost every one of them started their narration with the information about his position and status during the war. This war experience, life story is a main source of legitimation in this process because it is extraordinary and uncomprehensive. One of the sources of this legitimization is that they evoke the emotions among the audience and some of the recent

---

<sup>22</sup> In a private atmosphere, surrounded by a like-minded friends, they will openly show their admiration for fascists such as Jure Francetić – Croatian Ustaša (member of Croatian fascist, ultra-nationalistic Second World War movement) – who was the commander during the Second World War responsible for the massacre of Bosnian Serbs and Jews.

works on social movements are showing that emotions can play important role in the social movement development (Flam and King 2006) Their absolute sacrifice gives them the authority to demand changes. In this particular point of time, the HQ was in the focus of the whole Croatian public. This will continue with their second collective activity, which will at the end cause the decline of the whole movement.

## **2.4. The Memory Column – Frame Alignment**

On the 18 September I came to Vukovar in order to participate in the *Memory Column*, a commemoration for the victims of Ovčara massacre which happened during the Homeland war (in 1991). It was a cloudy and windy day and I was preparing for a trip to Vukovar with my father, retired military officer. Our first stop was in the nearby village (next to my hometown on our way to Vukovar) where we picked up his friend. After the few cigarettes and small chat with his wife, we were on our way to the commemoration. The road was almost empty, and that surprised me. More than 150 000 people was expected to gather in Vukovar. But, upon entering the city, we had difficulties with finding a parking place. The parking plots were occupied with busses and personal cars with the registration plates from all around the country – and abroad<sup>23</sup>. It took us about half an hour to find a suitable parking place and the moment I got out of the car, the scene I encountered drawn me more than 20 years back. The column of “soldiers”, the retired war veterans dressed in military uniforms with brigade flags were marching in front of us. The whole scene was intensified with the urban surrounding. Namely, the particular street was under the reconstruction so asphalt

---

<sup>23</sup> Official national holidays and remembrance days are often very important days in the calendars of Croatian *guestworkers*. On these occasions they are coming back home or visiting places of the special meaning, like for example the gathering in Bleiburg, beginning of May as a commemoration for Bleiburg massacre which happened in 1945 when partisan troops killed thousands of Ustaše (Croatian WWII fascist army) surrender. This historical episode is important aspect of rightist agenda because it represents the betrayal of the Croats by the Allied forces, especially British ones which are inside HQ discourse also recognized as foreign enemies.

was removed. The stones and earth instead of concrete pavements and road with the shrapnel traces visible on the facades – all reminded too vividly on the war pictures from this town and the original memory column that happened more than 20 years ago. Everything was intensified with the expectation of – what will happened today? Through some informal but confidential channels we hear the information that this year's column will be different. Following the HQ politics of denunciation, this time they are planning the special dramaturgy for the commemoration column in which it will be shown who are the *real Vukovar Croats* are and those who have no respect for Vukovar's victimhood. The idea about two columns was announced but it is still to be seen how this will be performed.

As usual, the program starts in the yard of memorial hospital from where people were drown to the Ovčara camp and executed. This year's program held under the motto *Vukovar – place of special piety*, the same as HQ's main claim. This can be read as an attempt of the frame extension (Snow et al 1984) but in the opposite direction. Namely, this tactic is not used by the HQ, the social movement organizers but by their opponents, the Government representatives. The official program – organized by the State and local authorities- was supposed to start at 10.00 with the Croatian anthem which will be followed by speeches and music. As I approached the hospital, it was obvious that even before this program started, the HQ members organized the column, so called *Vukovar's Croatia column* as a symbol of protest against the current Government and their politics. I recognized people who were shouting and forming the column headed with the group of people caring huge Croatian flag. My companions, my father and his friend, stayed with their comrades and I proceeded towards the hospital yard. At the entrance, I realized that the yard is almost empty and the program is about to start. Then I saw a lady in a blue wind-jacket. She was one of the volunteer informal security guards organized for this event by HQ. I asked her about the

situation now and she explained that they are giving instructions (and then she correct herself by using the word *advices*) to people who ask – after the moment of silence in the official program, they will all turn around and join the column which is already going on. That is how the protest was imagined. I waited to see what will happen, and as HQ expected, people from the hospital's yard left the place and joined the column already formed in the main road in front of the hospital building. M. and I joined them too. M. became my guide through present and past. While we were walking down the streets towards the memorial cemetery out of the town, she showed me important military points sharing her life history and memories on Homeland war (among others, the period of captivation in the Serbian prison/camp). We spent more than 2 hours in that column, singing songs and sometimes joining the prayer. After coming back to the town where I was supposed to meet my father and his friend, we found out that other column with official protocol (State representatives) was stopped on one of the crossroads when they tried to join the HQ's column. Members of the HQ placed candles in front of the officers with flags. The representatives of ruling Government interpreted that as “rude example of politicizing collective suffer for gaining political points” (Milanka Opačić, Head of the Ministry of Social Politics and Youth).

The same as the column itself, the opinions in the general public were divided. Upon arrival in Zagreb I discussed this event with some people who were there and some who watched it on the television. Overall, everyone was against newly caused divisions especially regarding the important such an important commemoration. It was often mentioned that it is not the right thing to do to the victims for which this is happening in the first place. Some have interpreted it as a manifestation of the broad discontent towards the current Government, and some as a result of the well-developed HQ strategy to lead people in their column. The fact that the HQ members started the column before the official program started is thought through collective action. The majority

of people who came shortly before the program started faced the scene where one column is already going. This brought them in the position to choose between joining the flowing column with the rest of the people or to enter half empty hospital yard. The bodily experience of some visitors who were participating in the column in the previous years, directed them to join the column

I went there because of the Column...I am not interested in political speeches anyway, but when I saw that people are moving, I thought that maybe some changes in the official organization have happened and that is why I joined, not because I support the HQ...when I realized that they created actually a kind of *mis en scène* which *dragged* me in *their* column, I was bit angry...I really don't want this event to be a part of someone's political struggle (Ksenija)

This opened the problem of representation and the possibility of the extension. Ksenija's participation is, from the wider public, interpreted as an act of support for the HQ's and their politics. But, on the contrary, her bodily practices was far from the awareness of the full symbolic behind this particular action. This brings us to the issue of *real* or consciousness support and one that is induced because the whole ideology behind does not allow the possibility of different interpretation. The notion of interpretation is crucial for the next subchapter where the next *strategic* step of the HQ will be presented.

## **2.5. 'Vukovar as a place of special piety' – Different Interpretation of the Movements Success**

The main project, as one of the members of the HQ civic initiative presented it, from the beginning of their activities is to introduce the legal protection of Vukovar's victimhood during the war. The first step, which was imagined as an initiative on the state level, was to organize

referendum on the issue of the national minority right. They started the petition in order to propose referendum on the following question

Do you support that Article 12. 1 of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities (Official Gazette no. 155/02., 47/10., 80/90 and 93/11) be amended to read: 'Equal official use of the language and script by members of a national minority shall be released in the area of a unit of local self-government, state administration and the judiciary, when members of an individual national minority comprise at least half the population of such unit?' (U-VIIR-4640/2014, Constitutional Court Decision)

The initiative successfully collected the sufficient number of the signatures (10% of the complete number of the registered voters in the country) in the legally proscribed two weeks period. After the list of signatures was revised by the Croatian Parliament and it was confirmed that enough valid signatures was collected, the Parliament requested from the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia to review the conformity of a referendum question with the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. This was the last instance in the institutional system which can decide will the referendum be held or it will be cancelled. The Constitutional Court decided that the referendum on this issue is against the Croatian Constitution because "it is not permitted to call a referendum on the proposed referendum question" (U-VIIR-4640/2014) and it goes directly against other democratic norms guaranteed to the citizens of Croatian nationality.

Except of the direct elaboration on the issue why this question is against the fundamental norms of Croatian Constitution, the decision consists also from few recommendation on the further steps which should be taken by the Local authorities what is not usual part of their previous practices. The Court ordered the Town Council to prescribe in the State of the Town of Vukovar the individual rights of members of national minorities to the official use of their language and script according to circumstances of life and "actual circumstances in the Town..., in a scope which does not endanger the very essence of those rights, at the same time *to respect the needs of majority Croatian population stemming from the still vivid consequences of the Greater Serbian aggression*

*at the beginning of the 1990s*” (U-VIIR-4640/2014, emphasis added). Although it prevented the calling a referendum on the official use of the language and script of national minorities, the HQ members interpreted this decision as their victory. Immediately after the Decision is published in the Official Gazette, one of the administrators (my key informant) wrote the following comment on the HQ official Facebook page continuing the discourse of the *battle* with which their actions started in the first place “*We reached our primary goal! Vukovar is defended. The Constitutional Cour ordered that bilingual signs must be removed. Battle for Croatia is to be continued!*” (August 12, 2014). With this, it was explicitly announced that they are planning future actions no matter the fact that their initial goal is achieved.

Their initial goal is finally achieved because the County of the Town of Vukovar introduced demanded changes in the Town’s Statue – Vukovar is treated as a *place of special piety* with one official language – Croatian and Latin as official letters. This achievement inspired the members of the HQ’s analytical and organizational committee (term used by one of my informants) to continue with their actions inside the juridical system. Their widely imagined strategy encompass different aspects of social life. These strategic goals are operationalized through the projects on the local level but also demands changes in the national level, same as the private and the public sphere. Their official webpage is an representation of their future and previous strategies. It consists the numerous project description written in a particular ideological, nationalist agenda. This is particularly visible in the webpage headings such as – *events, projects, ongoing activities* and *donations*. They accurately provide the interpretations of the political events which are happening in the society and communicate them with their supporters and wider audience. After the new wave of war-veterans and disabled-war veterans protest started last year the HQ lost its space in the media sphere who were focusing now mainly on the events in the Capital where new protests are taking place.

It is hard to give overall conclusion on the issue of the success of the HQ movement (Banaszak 1996), but one is for sure, although medias are not paying lot of attention to their projects, they are still intensively working in realizing their visions for the better *Croatia in which traiditinoal values will be respected as they should be* (Ž. M. HQ member).

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The turbulent twentieth century of the Croatian history left the whole spectrum of different ideological residues which are constantly appearing in the public sphere. This is the reflection of the intensive process of forgetting and remembering which creates the contested field of national collective memory. The most palpable one, which is indispensable inside the right-wing nationalistic discourse is the ideological heritage of the Croatian fascist regime which lasted during the Second World War. Explicitly or tacitly, this rhetoric is found in the fundamental opposition to the socialist/communist remnants from the period of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (or in *jargon former Yugoslavia*).

One of the main protagonists in the current political and ideological debate that goes along the above described line of signifying is the group of the Croatian war-veterans or Croatian defenders/*branitelji* from the Homeland war (that followed the dissolution of the Yugoslav regime in the nineties). Their perceived social status and position are characterized with the discrepancy between their imagined and socially recognized importance. This position of the relative deprivation is presented as one of the main arguments for their collective actions. Their rhetoric is based on the constant reflection on the past historical events which are constantly reinterpreted in the present social context in a way to support their claims and justify their actions. This thesis showed the chronology of the social movement led by the war-veteran and the war-victims civic initiative *The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar* which was established after, according to the Census data published in 2012, the threshold of one third of a whole population is set for an official use of a minority language in a self-government unit - city, town or county. In this

particular case it refers to the Cyrillic letters as official language of the Serbian minority in the town of Vukovar.

Vukovar has a special place in the Croatian national history because it was a setting where one of the strategically and tactically most important battles was fought during the Homeland war in which Croatia won its Independence. The battle was lost what was followed by brutal massacre committed by the Serbian forces. These are outlines of the victimhood which is inscribed into the picture of a *heroic town of Vukovar* and which is used as an agenda for preventing the installation of the bilingual signs in Cyrillic letter (perceived as a symbol of the Serbian aggression) and Latin letter on the State Institutions in the town.

This event prompted the reaction of the war veterans from the town of Vukovar and the nearby villages which stood one more time to defend the *Croatian identity* from the same enemies like more than 20 years ago – communist/socialist ideology and the Serbian hegemony. This politics of denunciation was interpreted as one of the strategies the HQ applied for getting the support from the wider population and to *recruit* potential participants for the future actions. This was especially visible on few occasions described in the text. During the protest organized in the Capital in April 2003 and the commemoration on the Ovčara victims – *Memory Column* in November of the same year. These were the main field sites of this research where most of the data were collected and personal connections for future interviews were made.

This tried to show how the ideological discrepancies serve as a resource for the mobilization. The main actors selected particular figures, events and practices from the past, and by placing them in the political and social context of Croatia in that period of time, used them as a strategic tools for amplifying, transforming and extending the framework needed for the successful resonance (Williams2004) of their claims with the public. The HQ gained temporary power *in numbers* (they managed to collect more than 650 000 signatures for calling the referendum). They

and succeeded in implementing the formulation – *Vukovar as a place of special piety* in the Town's Statute what was their main goal. But on the other hand, we can claim that the final extension of their claims (through variety of announced law suits, social and political projects) weakened their public acknowledgment and at the end caused the decline of the movement.

## REFERENCES

Alexander, Jeffrey. 2006 "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy" Pp. 29-91 in *Social Performance. Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen and Jason L. Mast. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aralica, Ivan. 2012. *Mentalni komunist: postupci i mantre jednog predsjednika kao društveni, mentalni i personalni predložak "Sebastijanovih priča" ("Ambre", "Fukare", "Svetinke") i "Puža."* Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak.

Assman, Aleida. 2008. "Canon and Archive." Pp. 97-109 in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin Germany, New York, USA: Walter de Gruyter.

Assman, Jan. 2008. "Communicative and Cultural Memory." Pp. 109-119 in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin Germany, New York, USA: Walter de Gruyter.

Azaryahu, Maoz. 1986. "Street Names and Political Identity: The Case of East Berlin." *Journal of Contemporary History* 21(4):581-604.

Banaszak, Lee Ann. 1996. *Why Movements Succeed or Fail*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Begić, Nada; Mirjana Sanader and Ozren Žunec. 2007. "Ratni veteran u starom Rimu i u današnjoj Hrvatskoj." *Polemos* 10(2):11-30.

Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Correia, Silvia Barbosa. 2012. "The Veteran's movement and First World War memory in Portugal (1918-33): between the Republic and Dictatorship." *European Review of History- Revue européenne d'histoire* 19(4):531-551.

Docea, Vasile. 2010. "History, Ideology and Collective Memory: Reconstructing the Identities of Timișoara by Means of Monographies and Street Names during the Communist Regime (1947 – 1989)." *European and Regional Studies* 1(1):83-102.

Erll, Astrid. 2008. "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction." Pp. 1-11 in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin Germany, New York, USA: Walter de Gruyter.

Flam, Helena and Debra King. 2006. "Introduction" Pp. 1-19 in *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by Helena Flam and Debra King. London and New York: Routledge.

Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Hebel, Udo J. 2008. "Sites of Memory in U. S. – American Histories and Cultures." Pp. 47-61 in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin Germany, New York, USA: Walter de Gruyter.

Heberle, Rudolf. 1951. *Social Movements: An Introduction to Political Sociology*. New York, USA: Appleton-Century- Croft. Inc.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1992. "Intorduction: Inventing Tradition." Pp. 1-14 in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

King, Brayden G. and Sarah A. Soule. 2007. "Social Movements as Extra-Institutional Entrepreneurs: The Effect of Protests on Stock Price Returns." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 52:413-442.

Koren, Snježana. 2002. "Yugoslavia: a Look in the Broken Mirror." Pp. 193-202 in *Clio in the Balkans: The Politics of History Education*, edited by Christina Koulouri. Thessaloniki, Greece: Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe.

Kubal, Timothy and Rene Bacerra. 2014. "Social Movements and Collective Memory." *Sociology Compass* 8(6):868-875.

Kurzman, Charles. 1996. "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979." *American Sociological Review* 61(1): 153-170.

Lea, David. 2015. "Dealing with the contested past in Serbia: decontextualization of the war veterans memories" *Nations and Nationalism*. 21(1):102-119.

Le Rider, Jacques. 2008. "Mitteleuropa as a lieu de mémoire." Pp. 37- 47 in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin Germany, New York, USA: Walter de Gruyter.

Loytomaki, Stiina. 2012. "Law and Memory: The Politics of Victimhood." *Griffith Law Review* 21(1):1-22.

McAdam, Doug, Sydney G. Tarrow and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald. 2001. "The Enduring Vitality of the Resource Mobilization Theory of Social Movements." Pp. 533-565 in *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, edited by Johnatan H. Turner. New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publisher.

Narayan, Kirin. 1993. "How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?." *American Anthropologist* 95(3):671-686.

Nora, Pierre. 1997. "General Introduction: Between Memory and History." Pp. 1-21 in *Realms of Memory*, edited by Pierre Nora. New York USA: Columbia University Press.

Olson, Mancur. 1965. *Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Opp, Karl- Dieter, 2009. *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique and System*. London UK, New York USA: Routledge.

Rihtman Auguštin, Dunja. 2002. *Ulice moga grada*. Beograd, Serbia: Biblioteka XX vek.

Schäuble, Michaela. 2014. *Narrating Victimhood. Gender, Religion and the Making of Place in Post-war Croatia*. New York – Oxford: Berghahn.

Sebetovsky, Mario. 2002. *The Battle of Vukovar: The Battle That Saved Croatia*. Quantico, Virginia: United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps University.

Snow, David. A, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilizationk, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4):464-481.

Snow, David. 2004. "Framing Processes, ideology and Discursive Fields." Pp. 380-413 in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi. Maiden, USA: Blackwell Publishing.

Svensson, Birgitta. 1995. "Lifetimes – life history and story: biographies of modern Swedish intellectuals." *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 25:25-42.

Špegelj, Martin. 2001. "The war in Slovenia and Croatia up to the Sarajevo ceasefire." Pp. 32-43 in *The War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1991-1995*, edited by Branka Magaš and Ivo Žanić. London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2001.

Ugrešić, Dubravka. 1998. *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Werther, Steffen and Madeleine Hurd. 2014. "Go East Old Man: The Ritual Spaces of SS Veterans' Memory Work" *Culture Unbound* 6:327-359.

Winter, Jay. 2008. "Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War." Pp. 61-76 in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin Germany, New York, USA: Walter de Gruyter.

Wood, Nancy. 1999. *Vectors of Memory. Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Žunec, Ozren. 2006. "Apsolutna žrtva i relativna kompenzacija: proturječja društvenog položaja veteran i državne skrbi za ratne veterane i invalide." *Polemos* 9(2):11-41.

## LEGAL ACTS

Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities 155/02, 47/10, 80/10.

Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (consolidated text), Official Gazette 85/2010.

Act on the Rights of Croatian Defenders from the Homeland War 022-03/14-01/81, 92/2014.

The Constitutional Court Decision U-VIIR-4640/2014.

Statut Grada Vukovara/ The Statute of Vukovar, 7/01, 2/04, 2/06, 2/08, 7/13.

## FREQUENTLY USED INTERNET SOURCES

*The Headquarter for the Defense of Croatia Vukovar*

Official Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/stozer.hrvatskogvukovara.9>

Official webpage - <https://www.facebook.com/stozer.hrvatskogvukovara.9>