GENDER, MEMORY AND YOUTH CULTURE IN POSTWAR VUKOVAR, CROATIA

By

Sara Maksimović

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Department of Gender Studies

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Supervisor: Professor Jasmina Lukić

Second Reader: Nadia Jones-Gailani

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Abstract

The Battle of Vukovar in 1991 was one of the most violent events in Europe after World War II and a crucial point in the war for Croatian independence (1991-1995). Once a harmonious multiethnic city, Vukovar is now an ethnically segregated community. The postwar generations in Vukovar are born into isolated ethnic communities: Croats and Serbs attend different kindergarten and school programs, even different cafés. This thesis examines ethnic segregation as a state of prolonged conflict which affects Serbian and Croatian youth. It focuses on the position of youth culture in the hegemonic memorial culture of Vukovar, which is characterized by the organization of urban life around gendered nationalist narratives of war. Relying on interviews with teachers and students, as well as other textual and visual materials, I argue that postwar youth culture in Vukovar is a form of negotiation and resistance to the dominant culture which reinforces ethnic segregation through the mobilization of cultural trauma and gendered narratives of nationhood and propose that 'youth' is a powerful category through which these hegemonic narratives can be challenged.

Key terms: youth culture, segregation, identity, hybridity, memory, commemoration, nationalism

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree for any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 23046 words

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Signed _____

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

HDZ (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica) – Croatian Democratic Union

HOS (Hrvatske Obrambene Snage) – Croatian Defense Forces

JNA (Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija) – Yugoslav People's Army

Introduction

In February 2017, a nineteen-year old male-identified person was arrested in Vukovar for posting stickers with fascist imagery around town, invoking (and unfortunately, celebrating) the historical violence of Croats against Serbs. By this time, I was already preparing to do a qualitative research on postwar youth culture in this small town which seemed to embody, in condensed form, the complexities of identity-making in postwar Croatia. The images in question reminded me that the layers of history that constitute the category of postwar youth exist in a very personal form, even if they sometimes take us half a century into the past. What began as an inquiry into the formation of youth identities with a focus on relationships between ethnicity, gender and age in the reproduction of segregation, expanded towards a consideration of youth responses to postwar culture and the transgenerational effects of cultural trauma, requiring an interdisciplinary approach which cuts across studies of post-conflict, memory, youth and identity. I thus begin by situating my research in the existing scholarship from these fields of inquiry.

Ethnic Conflict in Vukovar

The final years of social life in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was constituted by the now independent states of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, are frequently characterized as a period of ethnic tensions (which were not adequately resolved after World War II) caused by growing economic inequalities and the demise of the unifying 'Yugoslav' identity, which followed the death of Josip Broz Tito, the idolized state leader, in 1980[1] (Mojzes 2011, 132). The absence of an authoritative political figure contributed to increased foreign interventions and economic reforms in the 1980s. Neal Curtis (2007) describes the restructuring of Yugoslavia by "foreign

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[1] Other sources on the history of Yugoslav conflicts include Sekelj (1990), Danchev and Halverson (1996) and Baker (2015).

creators" in that period as "economic war" – the strategic destruction of Yugoslav "market socialism" through the increase of foreign debt (5). Economic problems in the former republic came to be recognized as shortcomings of the socialist system, leading to the popularization of the idea of liberal democracy. What was once an investment of agency in the worker's identity as the main focus in legitimizing state ideology by the political elites, became an investment of agency in national identity (Gagnon and Brown 2004, 73). This process gave way to the establishment of nationalist projects such as the one of 'Greater Serbia' propagated by Slobodan Milošević. The ultimate result was the dissolution of Yugoslavia, which officially began on June 25th, 1991, when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence (Finlain 2004, 17). The event was followed by the mobilization of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA)[2] and the outbreak of wars across Yugoslavia.

My study of post-conflict focuses on the aftermath of the war in Croatia (1991-1995), usually referred to as the 'Homeland war' in the official state discourse[3]. The war in Croatia had begun to unravel already in 1990 with the so-called 'Log revolution' initiated by members of the Serbian population on Croatian territory, who protested the outcome of elections in Croatia – the success of the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union and its leader Franjo Tuđman – by blocking the roads with logs and rocks. Paul Mojzes (2011) explains the speed with which the distrust between Serbs and Croats escalated:

> The Serbs in Croatia vividly remembered what happened to them under the Independent State of Croatia during World War II and responded with understandable concern, especially as Serb politicians and Orthodox churchmen stoked this memory with the dramatic excavations of World War II mass graves during the 1980s. The fact that the right wing of the Croatian

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[2] Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija
[3] In an effort to avoid the inevitable exclusions and one-sided reasoning that this term entails, I will not be using it in my analysis (it will, however, appear in qualitative material).

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nationalists resorted to slogans and images of the Ustase reinforced the fear (151).

History was easily used to fuel conflict and quite soon neighbors and friends became enemies. Such was the case of Vukovar, the city in eastern Croatia in which my research takes place.

The heavy bombing and shooting in Vukovar lasted for 87 days and eventually led to the occupation of the town by JNA and the Serbian paramilitary forces on November 18th 1991. This event is known as the Battle of Vukovar and represents the greatest destruction of a city in Europe after World War II (Thomas and Mikulan 2006, 48). It was followed by ethnic cleansing and war crimes, the most brutal of which was the massacre at Ovčara. But the energy and time it took to occupy the city proved to be crucial for the general outcome of the war: Croatia reclaimed occupied territory, including Vukovar, through peaceful reintegration in 1998. This fact has enabled the positioning of Vukovar as a self-sacrificing 'hero' in Croatian narratives of statehood (Schellenberg 2014, 19).

Immediately after the war, ethnic segregation was introduced as one of the post-conflict peace strategies, enabling separate educational programs or shifts for Croats and Serbs in kindergartens, elementary schools and high schools. Today, this situation extends outside of educational institutions in the form of separate cafés and even separate children's sandboxes on playgrounds (Simić Bodrožić 2014, 55). The question of segregation complicates the idea of post-conflict peacebuilding[4] by simultaneously signifying the continuation of conflict and its resolution, in other words, it is a means by which the 'post-conflict' is extended indefinitely (and so is the fragility of identities and relations in the community). The consequences of remaking the nation and the challenges that postwar generations face in ethnically segregated communities across former Yugoslavia are compellingly described in

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[4] For a more detailed overview of the challenges and strategies of post-conflict peacebuilding see Goh and McGuirk (2007), Chetail (2009) and Gagnon and Brown (2014).

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Azra Hromadžić's (2015) study of a high school in Mostar, where Bosnian and Croatian students attend separate educational programs in the same building. Much of Hromadžić's observations about the relationship between postwar youth culture and re-creating a national identity through exclusion and separation can be applied to the Vukovarian context. She emphasizes the importance of 'mixing' as a "powerful site for the interpretation and evaluation" of relationships affected by violent histories (88), and I intend to take this argument further by introducing an intersectional perspective and showing that the dynamics of interrelating identity categories – gender, age and ethnicity – can serve as a basis for the production of such 'mixed' spaces.

Youth and Post-Conflict

There are several ways to define youth, with three relatively popular approaches: youth as an age category, youth as a physiological category, and youth a social category (Özerdem and Podder 2015, 2). The first one defines youth according to a particular period in a person's life, usually between the ages of 15 and 24. In this case, the category is applied regardless of the similarities or differences between individuals within this age group. The second approach acknowledges that a universal age frame is arbitrary and focuses more on the physical changes that are considered to mark the transition from childhood into adulthood. However, even such biologist distinctions are to some extent arbitrary and vary across cultural contexts, which is why the third common approach addresses youth as a social construct, paying special attention to the historical contingencies and intersecting positions that constitute this heterogeneous category. This final approach opens the possibility of seeing social processes that bind this age group together without making essentialist conclusions about the characteristics of youth, in other words, it enables us to think about 'youth culture' and 'youth' as the effects of practices and discourses anchored in power relations, which can change as overall social conditions change.

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In interviewing young and adult members of the community, I was able to observe how 'youth' comes to be constructed in relation to other age categories such as 'childhood' and 'adulthood' – generally, through the understanding that youth is somewhere in the middle and is therefore constituted by the uncertain transition from childhood to adulthood (Hodkinson and Deicke 2007, 1). However, the strengthening of consumer culture in western societies has led to the prolongation of this transition, as well as to changes in the perception of what 'youth' entails. Ageing is now an increasingly 'managed' process of consuming products and engaging in leisure activities with the purpose of establishing a youthful lifestyle for any generation (ibid. 29). In spite of this process of 'youth' becoming a lifestyle available to anyone with buying capacity the specificities of generations and the "intra-class dynamic between youth and parents" (Hall and Jefferson 2003, 30) have not yet been erased.

A primarily class-oriented contribution to youth studies was delivered by the so-called Birmingham school (Birmingham's Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, e.g. CCCS), with Stuart Hall as its most prominent author. Hall and Jefferson edited an extensive collection on post-war youth culture in 1970s United Kingdom called *Resistance through Rituals* (2003), which remains one of the most influential works in the cultural sociology of youth. BCCS authors applied Gramsci's concept of cultural 'hegemony' – a form of (class) domination which entails the consent of subordinated groups – in their theories about working-class youth culture to "situate youth in the dialectic between a 'hegemonic' dominant culture and the subordinate 'parent' culture, of which youth is a fraction" (Hall and Jefferson 2003, 38). This meant that youth culture gained its specific form and status in relation to capitalist hegemony and the parental working-class identity, by negotiating with these cultures and 'winning space' (ibid. 42) to pursue their own needs and desires. The concept which appears to capture the most significant aspects of this process is the concept of 'subcultures': a specific form of social grouping produced and reflected through the

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appropriation of localities and the profiling of 'lifestyles' through practices of interaction, consumption and leisure (ibid. 46). In subculture theory, it is important to detect "'focal concerns' central to the inner life of the group: things always 'done' or 'never done', a set of social rituals which underpin their collective identity and define them as a 'group' instead of a mere collection of individuals." (ibid. 47). I recognized these elements in an interview with a group of three boys, who described their social circle in terms of shared values and practices. I named them 'the brewers' according to their ritual of cannabis consumption – a practice around which they organize their group life, including their specific responses to the structural conditions of segregation.

The main criticism directed at subculture theory is the assumption that the collective characteristics of youth groups are rigid and fixed (Hodkinson and Deicke 2007, 38). Contemporary theorists of youth often dismiss this understanding as simplistic and outdated, pointing not only to the stratifying effects of categories besides class, such as gender, race and ethnicity, but also to the agency of youth in relation to different markets. Youth is increasingly viewed from the perspective of "individualized fluidities" flourishing under the influence of diverse cultural industries, whereby young individuals are no longer expected to make long lasting commitments to a single collective identity (Hodkinson and Deicke 2007, 9). The tendency to favor partial, temporary alliances and grouping has come to be conceptualized as 'neotribalism' (Maffesoli 1996) or 'scene' (Bennett and Peterson 2004). While it makes sense to consider these forms of associations as new ways of establishing relationships among youth, I consider both 'neotribalism' and 'subculture' useful concepts which may capture different instances between the individual and the collective, social control and agency, or permanent/static and temporary/fluid identifications and relationships. I believe it is worthwhile to consider some of the tensions produced by neotribal associations in situations where dominant culture is so invested in maintaining an ideology of clearly defined

borders between groups, as well as the subversive potential of more committed youth alliances. With this in mind, I consider youth culture as a discursive platform for negotiation with, and resistance to, dominant forms of relations established through various institutions. This is not to say that youth culture is inherently subversive, as some romanticizing accounts imply (Hodkinson and Deicke 2007, 30), but rather that members of youth culture are often positioned in a way that provides multiple perspectives and enables more fluid identifications, particularly because they are frequently marginalized and perceived as 'not yet' agents of society (Eglinton 2013, 3). These positions are further complicated by categorizations which, among others, include gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and ability.

The increasing popularity of intersectional methodologies (McCall 2005; Collins 2015) in youth studies has resulted in fascinating explorations of relationalities between globalization, postmodern capitalism and ongoing reconfigurations within social institutions such as the family and the nation (Nayak 2003; Hodkinson and Deicke 2007; Nayak and Kehily 2013; Dolby and Rizvi 2008). Changes in social landscapes, including changes in labor and consumption practices among young men and women have resulted in changing discourses around masculinity and femininity. While the transition from school to work created an opportunity for young men to embody ideal masculinity in industrial times, modern masculinity is increasingly represented as "in crisis", caused by the expansion of the so-called 'soft' economy "centred upon services, catering and call-centre work" which "has been interpreted as the 'feminization' of labour" (Nayak and Kehily 2013, 54). The decline of industrial and warrior masculine ideals in capitalist societies has brought the maintenance of masculine identity and privilege into question, resulting in insecurities for young men pursuing a socially recognizable transition to manhood. In contrast, young girls are gaining visibility as ultimate neoliberal subjects in western culture, provided they accept the new patriarchal, post-feminist conditions of their economic and sexual 'freedom' centered around

consumption (McRobbie 2009, 56). My research draws on these considerations in order to shed a new light on the ruptures in identity-forming processes of the postwar generation, characterized by their positioning as gendered subjects of a rapid political transition. By focusing on intersecting identities and shifting allegiances among postwar youth as grounds for reconciliation, I argue for more youth-inclusive community-building which is often absent from dominant discourses around conflict and post-conflict, whereby young people are either demonized as agents of political violence or infantilized and thus denied political agency (Özerdem and Podder 2015, 7). Such polarizing discourses fail to recognize the role of young people as participants in democratic and reparative social processes. To counter these assumptions, I rely on standpoint epistemology as a way of accounting for the knowledge and lived experience of youth as a subordinated group and the knowledge of all those who are excluded from (re)constructing dominant views on ethnic difference in Croatia. I privilege Vukovarian postwar youth as producers of knowledge who have access to a wide array of identifications and perspectives, considering their multidimensional standpoint in the local power dynamics (Nagy Hesse-Biber et al. 2004, 17). This perspective requires a careful consideration of the way youth is positioned within the state and its educational system, as well as the family.

Identity, Memory and Generation

Postwar youth emerges as a distinct group through specific cultural practices and their encounter with the challenges of constructing identities, traditions and values anew. The notion of cultural identity plays a central part in the production of difference on the one hand, and various types of belonging on the other. Stuart Hall (1996) remarks that perspectives on cultural identity involve a sense of continuity and a collective essence, as well as a sense of discontinuity, eternal 'becoming' and transformation (214). This degree of instability (in the absence of a 'fixed origin') in positioning the 'self' within culture opens spaces for

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negotiating identities and contesting power distributions, but it also accounts for the work that individuals invest in maintaining or re-establishing stable identities – in large part, this is the work of imagination (Anderson 1993). In the case of Croatia, the emergence of a new state called for a re-articulation of collective identity, which, according to Christina Demaria (2007) entails the reconstitution of memory (56). The political significance of memory in the present – what gets to be remembered or forgotten, how and why (Radstone and Schwartz 2010, 3) – is important for understanding the complexities that constitute the broader context of postwar generation in Croatia, who face the erasure of memories from before the 1990s in favor of state-making memories of the war for independence (Markovina 2015).

As a social process of constructing the past, memory can occur on an individual or collective level. Wulf Kansteiner (2011) asserts that it is important to distinguish autobiographical memory from collective forms of remembrance (300), but even as we do so, we cannot isolate either one from cultural influences. Individual memories are influenced by social locations of individuals who are remembering: the same event can be recounted differently by people of different social status, cultural identity or gender. In discussing postwar youth and their relationship to memory, individual memories fall into the realm of family histories and extend to collective memories inscribed in the culture and space of the city (ibid.). Kansteiner claims that memories are "at their most collective" when they are no longer tied to the time and space in which they were initiated, and they continue to exist as "disembodied, omni-present, low-intensity" memories (302). When these collective memories are traumatic, as is the case in Vukovar, it makes sense to speak of cultural trauma and to consider the changing levels of intensity in different political moments. According to Ron Eyerman (2001), who studies the symbolic position of slavery in the formation of African American identity, cultural trauma is a form of recollecting "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2). This

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conceptualization may account for the success with Croatian political elites have managed to mobilize the traumatic experience of social rupture and war in the 1990s in the service of constructing Croatian national identity. Parts of this thesis will show this production of feelings of national belonging in Croatia by analyzing the militaristic patriarchal narratives of ethnic conflict – the conflict between Serbs and Croats.

If we consider collective memory as a process that involves the construction of relatively stable ethnic/national identities (remembering a shared history), then segregation is one of its most extreme manifestations: as I intend to show, it presupposes that physical separation originates from ethnic differences (a core antagonism, to be more precise), rather than being the means of producing them. Segregation denies the possibility of hybrid identities and cultural mixing (Kalra et al. 2005; Yazdiha 2010), in fact, it can be regarded as the materialization of anxieties over the preservation of 'pure' identities[5]. From this perspective, it is worthwhile to consider the power dynamics implicated in the fact that some generations have experienced a life before segregation, while others have not. My focus on the transgenerational effects of memory is therefore guided by the simple idea that our personal memories merge and exist in relation to the memories of others "which are themselves suffused with other others' memories" (Freeman 2010, 263).

The process of transferring memory is deeply embedded in postwar conditions and the state project, with affective investments for youth that resonate with Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' (2012). I rely on this concept to account for the identity-making processes triggered by the transfer of memories. Postmemory differs from collective memory in its assumption of transgenerational familiarity and affective 'excess' – the "descendants of survivals (of victims as well as perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection

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[5] Not to say that such identities exist.

memory" (105). More importantly than signifying a temporal 'after', the 'post' in postmemory "reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture" (106) thus capturing a broader perspective on transgenerational issues and youth culture which is at the center of this research. Simply put, the generations that have lived before the war can mobilize their memories in ways that can reaffirm or contest the ideology of segregation, but the postwar generations can do the same by mobilizing postmemory.

If Croatian national and cultural identity is largely constructed through collective memories of trauma, then Vukovar is one of the central tropes in this construction. In her article *Politics and Remembrance in Post-War Vukovar*, Renata Schellenberg (2014) describes the ambivalent status of Vukovar as the 'city of heroes', both privileged as an emblem of national struggle for independence and disadvantaged in its confinement to a commemorative present. Boris Dežulović (2014) makes similar arguments in more expressive terms:

> Vukovar simply does not exist beyond its symbolic function. It was probably in
> the late 1980s that the town's newspapers last reported a news item that had no
> war connotations. Ever since then, every news story from Vukovar has had a
> war prefix, even if it was not directly connected with the war legacy. The rare
> flashes of social life in this town, for example the Vukovar Film Festival, are
> publicly significant – and therefore meaningful – only as improbable
> revelations of life in the dead town.

While this article provides a powerful critique of the discourses around Vukovar and their palpable consequences, I hope to show that the perception that there is no 'life' in Vukovar also comes from a dominant position which excludes youth from the horizon of political agency and reaffirms the patriarchal power relations between generations (and to point out the gendered implications). Youth culture simply cannot be reduced to this nationalist position: it represents a diversity of responses to the regulatory moves issued by the state, many of which

qualify as 'life' beyond the memorial and militarized urban culture of Vukovar. I would add that the past-oriented construction of the town is now challenged by neoliberal ideas about marketability and mobility – ideas that new generations are expected to be driven by. It is precisely this collision of past, present and future that calls for further inquiry if we are to understand the contradictions that occur in the lives upon which such high expectations are placed – the lives of postwar youth.

The theoretical concerns that I have outlined will be addressed in more detail in the following chapters, structured as follows:

In *Chapter 2*, I offer a reflection on the methodology of my research, arguing for a self-reflexive intersectional research practice.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role of segregation in producing identities. I emphasize the naturalizing effects of segregation in the formation of ideas about ethnic difference between young Serbs and Croats and point to a sense of transgenerational responsibility instilled into the postwar generation through collective memory and postmemory.

Chapter 4 deals with gendered and ethnicized images transferred between generations in the form of collective memory. I contend that this process constitutes a memorial culture which is the dominant (parent) culture of Vukovar.

In *Chapter 5*, I take a closer at the construction of youth identities in relation to the dominant memorial culture, examining the tensions produced by youth identifications and the emergence of youth culture as a response to the dominant culture.

Finally, in *Chapter 6*, I conclude by reflecting on the relevance of youth culture as an oppositional force to normative identity-making and a valuable concept in furthering our understanding of post-conflict environments.

Chapter 1. Feminist Methodology

Having outlined the interdisciplinary map of my theoretical concerns, I now to turn to the methodological issues around collecting oral histories, especially when it comes to the sensitivity of post-conflict testimonies and the different age groups involved.

Perhaps the most prominent argument against the validity of oral history is that it can stray significantly from factuality – narrators interpret, reinterpret, 'misremember' and even lie about the events they have experienced. But positivist assumptions about 'objective' sources have been thoroughly questioned by feminist scholars who advocate embodied and socially situated knowledge as a new paradigm of scientific authority (Haraway 1988; Hawkesworth 2006; Harding 2015). Ultimately, the dismissal of oral history is rooted in a misunderstanding of its purpose to reveal *meanings* rather than *events* (Portelli 2006, 36). The centrality of meaning, that is, the production of identities through the circulation of meaning in official and unofficial narratives is what convinced me that a qualitative analysis of oral and written materials would bring a fresh perspective to the topic of my research, which is predominantly surrounded by essentialist notions of identity.

As soon as I decided that this was the way to go about collecting data, a myriad of ethical problems was already appearing on the horizon. How was I to access traumatic memories without bringing those traumas back to life? How was I to balance the need to hide certain things about myself with my obligation to reveal certain things, both in the pursuit of my interviewees' trust? What would be the long-term effects of the research, and who would be affected? These questions might not have definite answers, but they need to be asked again and again in order to establish a responsible research practice – a non-hegemonic form of knowledge production. Some of the main concepts to consider in this effort are 'vulnerability' (Behar 1996), 'authority' (Saujani 2012), 'silences' (Johnston 2010) and 'intersectionality'

(Holguin Cuádraz and Uttal 1999), all of which are associated with feminist efforts to transform dominant forms of scientific research, which are often based on the exclusion of certain social groups from participating in the knowledge process.

Putting these considerations into practice was a much more difficult task than contemplating them, but I was often aware of their impact on the course of my research. Firstly, the interviews I am analyzing are the result of shared authority and collaboration, rather than a relationship between a subject and an object (Yow 2005, 1-2). In a situation of shared authority, power imbalances are not suspended (as this is impossible to achieve in social interaction), but power is negotiated and never settled on one side. In interviews presented here, this negotiation is manifested through mutual sharing of opinions and emotions, the absence of claims to objectivity or monopoly over questions. Interviewees often displayed their knowledge about my personal life and emphasized connections we may have through other people, or asked questions which would help them identify my position on certain topics. Not surprisingly, this too reflected the different locations each of us has in the power network made up of ethnic, gender and class identities and proved to be a challenge for the research process: not all participants were uninhibited and eager to ask me questions, nor did they all rush to answer mine. These are the significant silences that need to be acknowledged and examined with equal care as spoken words.

At times I felt it was a personal failure that several students from the Serbian program withdrew from participation in the research, and that I was unable to obtain consent from others. However, I came to understand that these silent spaces and omissions in interviews that did occur were part of the research process, and that they were valuable sources of knowledge (Johnston 2010, 302) – in fact, I often used silences as a research tool, either to avoid being antagonized or to simply allow a stream of thought. I thus introduce the 'Serbian' youth's perspective through three very valuable interviews with Serbian students and a

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collection of silences. I hope the following analysis will successfully contextualize these silences and provide space for them to communicate in their own way.

Most of the interviews happened in the Economics high school, the place where my mother and sister teach and where I did most of my fieldwork, but some of them took place in participants' homes and in my own home. It was important for me to incorporate what Martin and Glesne (2012) refer to as 'hospitality' into my research ethics, by emphasizing mutual care and community building as elements of the research process (216). Despite often being forced to acknowledge that at certain points my position as an outsider was brought to the foreground, my continuous engagement with school projects has helped me establish links with that community, ones that go beyond the research process. In most cases, I was granted trust by association with my mother and sister, who are both loved and respected in the school. Some situations were made easier through the intertwinement of the scientific and the personal, but some were complicated by a sense of responsibility and vulnerability – of myself as someone who was partially exposed, and of my family members, who came to be exposed through my actions.

At the risk of writing in a narcissistic way, I am using this section to introduce myself as a researcher and point to the effects of my social location and research politics in this process (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert 2014, 47). My close proximity to students in age was a large factor in determining the limits of my authority but also establishing lines of association which gave way to a certain level of trust. This was especially important in interviewing youth, since they are often regarded as a sensitive group which needs to be protected from manipulation (Ivana Simić-Bodrožić experienced much greater complications when interviewing children in Vukovar[6]). I tried to tackle this problem early on by deciding to only interview graduates who are over 18 years old (with the exception of one student whose

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[6] Simić-Bodrožić (2015).

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mother also participated) which made the process a bit less challenging. My belonging to the postwar generation, my somewhat ambiguous ethnic marking and family connections within the community have positioned me as a 'halfie' – someone who is both inside and outside the community (Subedi 2006). As a result, these interviews reflect the "dialectic between connection and otherness" enabled by the disclosure of my own vulnerability and a sense of responsibility in approaching vulnerable others (Behar 1996, 20). This is not only a matter of ethics and deconstructing colonial and patriarchal assumptions often concealed by depersonalized research, but indeed an attempt to know more and to use the 'self' as a research tool.

In her contribution to feminist debates on the uses of oral history, Joan Sangster (1994) asserts that "it is crucial that we ask how gender, race and class, as structural and ideological relations, have shaped the construction of historical memory" (7). This acknowledgement provides a background for my study of youth culture in Vukovar: identities, memory, commemoration and segregation are all relational processes which call for an intersectional approach. For example, I hope to show particular ways in which young people's positions are conditioned by gendered nationalist/ memorializing discourses, including class positions and ethnic discrimination. Methodologically, this means considering both the situational and the social location of my interviewee, moving from the analysis of individual experience towards an analysis of social structures, without mistaking one for the other or neglecting their correlation (Holguin Cuádraz and Uttal 1999, 173). Sampling is a significant factor in such an analysis, especially when fairly small numbers of participants are available to work with due to various factors, from migration to a lack of trust. The findings of this research are therefore not to be mistaken for generalized conclusions[7].

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[7] And I hope they are not presented in such a way, as it is easy to fall into that trap.

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In fully accepting the suggestion that 'youth' is one of the "social processes whereby age is socially constructed, institutionalized and controlled in historically and culturally specific ways" (Wyn and White 1997, 11), I find myself before the challenge of explaining how my methodological and theoretical focus on a particular postwar generation fits into this conceptual framework. The participants in my research who can be recognized as the insiders of youth culture were partly chosen based on age and their status as students or recent graduates. I emphasize that these principles of sampling were based on practical limitations and the assumption that certain specificities of postwar culture can be observed among those who were born after the war (1995 onwards). The sample is therefore by no means to be taken as an indication of who counts as 'young' or who is granted participation in youth culture. I have conducted 16 semi-structured, individual and group interviews: participants include 10 students with diverse backgrounds, 5 teachers and one school administrator/parent. Conversations lasted roughly between 1-2 hours and most of them took place in the Economics school building, where almost all the participants otherwise attended classes or worked (one exception is a student from the Technical school). To make reading easier, here are participant names (pseudonyms) according to the above listed categories:

STUDENTS	TEACHERS	PARENT/SCHOOL ADMINISTARTOR
Ana, Andrej, Domagoj, Filip, Iva, Jelena, Marija, Marin, Marko, Igor	Ines, Diana, Miloš, Sabina, Vesna, Gordana	Željka

Figure 1. Table of Interview Participants

I am applying discourse analysis aimed at contextualizing meanings that emerge within youth culture to produce coherent identities. The challenge taken up in this research can be summarized by Nan Alamilla Boyd's (2008) suggestion in approaching oral history: "The

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narrators' voices must, therefore, be read as texts, open to interpretation, and their disclosures should be understood as part of a larger process of reiteration, where identities are constantly constructed around very limited sets of meanings" (180). By this principle, discourse reveals the nuanced interplay between normativity and individual agency, the significance of their overlaps and contradictions in the production of identities, rather than assuming the existence of essential identities which simply need to be described.

The politics behind this methodology are especially significant for combating the ideological assumptions of segregation: in a place where difference is naturalized and conflict is fueled by the normative production of 'others', it is important to emphasize identification, empathy and responsibility in the pursuit of different modes of thinking. In a way, I had hoped that entering this post-conflict space – a space in which conflict is not resolved but negotiated – as a feminist researcher would provide a chance to contribute to mending broken ties. This may not have been achieved in any significant way, but the participants often indicated that shared curiosity and care were welcome interruptions of daily routines. The normative voices of the dominant postwar culture can be censoring, which is why sometimes we are required to create spaces for speaking otherwise even when few people will hear us – these are the spaces of postmemory and countermemory[8], painful spaces, therapeutic spaces. I believe the interviews I conducted qualify as such spaces, and therefore might extend beyond the aims of this thesis and beyond the imposed borders it interrogates.

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[8] I borrow this term from Kardov in Schellenberg (2014, 20).

Chapter 2. Segregation as Normative Identity-Making

The concept of identity has had its fair share of criticism within the more specific discussions of identity politics (Butler 2006) and nationalism (Malešević 2006), which problematized the tendency of essentializing and reifying identity categories (ibid. 20). In my consideration of this critique, I accept Hall's suggestion about identities being "the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them" (Hall and du Gay 1996, 6). By underlining the constructed, relational modality of identity, I hope to avoid making essentialist assumptions about youth identity, ethnicity or gender, while acknowledging that these assumptions do have a place in nationalist discourses of segregation. The following discussion is meant to provide some insight into the production of fixed identities through ethnic segregation and to introduce 'hybridity' – mixing and shifting identities (Yazdiha 2010, 33) – as a powerful way of challenging the exclusionary framing of ethnicity in Vukovarian postwar culture.

The Economics school was founded in 1954 under the administration of the Gymnasium[9]. As a separate, vocational high school, the Economics school had worked uninterrupted from 1958 until 1991. The school underwent a series of changes from the outbreak of war: in 1991 it was renamed into 'Saint Sava'[10] and attended by the remaining population, mostly Serbs, until peaceful reintegration in 1997. In 1998, the school was re-established as a Croatian institution with ethnically segregated programs, and now bears the name 'Economics School Vukovar' (Yearbook 2015). Unlike the more prestigious Gymnasium, however, the Economics school is struggling with the rapid decrease in the number of students enrolled

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[9] A general education high school, usually attended by students who plan to finish college.
[10] Saint Sava is the founding person of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a figure of enlightenment, which is why he continues to be celebrated annually by students and teachers in the Serbian-language program.

each year, largely due to depopulation and increasing mobility. Teacher's jobs and the very existence of the school depend on attracting more students through new projects and low admission standards – as well as on segregation. The segregated class arrangement justifies the existence of classrooms with two or three minority students in total, necessary for securing a large number of workplaces. This complicates the possibility of cancelling segregation in the form of the 'Croatian-language program' and 'Serbian-language program' [11]. The differences extend beyond a simple division between languages used in teaching. Croatian and Serbian students learn different versions of history without ever having to bring those versions together, they learn that there are crucial differences between their culture and language, and finally, that it is more convenient to socialize with members of the same ethnic group.

The organization of educational institutions according to ethnicity clearly suggests that there is an essential difference between Croatian and Serbian cultural identity. The most prominent discourses around segregation in the Economics school rationalize the separation of Serbs and Croats either as a standard model for multiethnic communities or as the only possible post-conflict solution. In the first case, the post-conflict reality is at least temporarily pushed to the background in the assertion of respect for minorities, far from any acknowledgement of structural exclusions and discrimination. In the second case, the 'post-conflict' reality is constructed through a sense of transgenerational responsibility – the responsibility of postwar youth to keep the wounds of their parents and grandparents open, in other words, not to forget. Segregated space thus becomes a highly contradictory space of negotiating ethnic conflict with peaceful coexistence – a post-conflict space.

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[11] Insistence upon fundamental differences between Croatian and Serbian language represents another strategy of producing fixed ethnic boundaries. According to the linguist Snježana Kordić (2010), it makes more sense to position the two on a continuum – as different versions of the same polycentric language (76), acknowledging *hybrid* versions as well. The differences between scriptures – Latin and Cyrillic – are more noticeable and thus pose a greater challenge for intercultural education.

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2.1 Naturalizing Ethnic Difference

One of the Croatian graduates, Marija, explains the benefits of segregation as follows: "*Well, for them it's, I mean, it's good because they have their own language and of course, they talk in their language and so they have a special program. Since this is a town where there are minorities, I don't know, there are others, for example in Istria, there are special programs in Italian.*"[12] To support claims in favor of segregation, Marija overemphasizes ethnic difference and presents segregation as its natural outcome. This opinion was expressed by a large number of interviewees. It is important to claim that "*they* have *their* own language", entirely different from Croatian, which can only be nurtured in a separate program. By drawing a parallel with Italian schools in Istria, she appeals to a universal standard of treating minorities in democratic nation states without making a reference to post-conflict specificity. In this formulation, segregation appears to be the effect of ethnic difference, rather than a tool of ethnicization. But the issue of ethnic conflict underpinning the need for separation inevitably arises, at least as a side note: "*Maybe there will also be less fights, I don't know.*"

Even when the issue of conflict is addressed directly, the borders between ethnic identities tend to be presented as fixed and unchangeable. While it may be acknowledged that these borders are the consequence of conflict, the idea that they can be removed is seen as unrealistic. After offering the benefits of intercultural education for consideration, I was often positioned as the naïve idealist: not actually living in Vukovar and subsequently not understanding the full scope of challenges and obstacles to sharing classrooms. One of the teachers, Diana, anticipated my position and immediately suggested that anti-segregationist politics are not anchored in lived experience: "*Honestly, I don't know how we would do without it. It sounds bad to anyone who's not from Vukovar – it's unimaginable. But I think there are still some internal differences, stuff that's being said at home, that there are just*

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[12] The transcripts are my own translation of interviews from Croatian to English, and are therefore in italics.

differences because of what happened, the war and all." In pointing out 'internal' differences, however, Diana is neglecting the social process of *internalizing* ethnic differences through segregation, again in favor of seeing it as the cause for separation.

Accounts like these are contradicted by the post-conflict testimonies of students and their family members in the documentary film *Will You Say Hi to Me on the Bus?[13]*, where several interviewees mention that nobody paid attention to ethnicity ("nije se gledalo") before the 1990s. Through personal memories of Yugoslav identity (a hybrid identity which included different ethnicities and religions on the basis of solidarity and cultural exchange), individuals were able to deconstruct ethnic difference and challenge the ideological basis of segregation. The makers of the film surely recognized the potential for deconstructing rigid ethnic labels in youth identity, which is often constructed through neotribal mixing and resistance to norms. But there are obstacles to positioning youth in such a way – members of the postwar generation are often policed by peers and family members, which can result in punishment for those who transgress ethnic boundaries.

2.2 Segregation as a Transgenerational Responsibility

Some teachers have noted that such transgressions by individual students may result in their marginalization and isolation in school. Students often regard ethnic segregation as a rule that applies to personal relationships, particularly sexual or romantic. Marija mentioned examples of romantic relationships between students from different programs, but immediately emphasized that such connections were not an option for her:

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[13] The documentary film *Oš Me Pozdravit u Busu?* (*Will You Say Hi to Me on the Bus?*) was the result o fan 18-month long project initiated by Nansen Dialogue Center and Fade In, and represents a creative platform for intercultural education through personal histories in Vukovar. Unfortunately, out of the initial 29 students from different high schools in Vukovar and Beli Manastir, only 13 of them finished the project. In the process of learning how to produce a documentary, Serbian and Croatian students were invited to explore their family histories on camera.

Marija: *Well, yeah. Really, I would never do it. I don't know, him too – a friend in class hooked up with one girl, whoa. I don't know.*

Sara: *What do you mean, you wouldn't?*

Marija: *Oh, because I sort of hold on to my own, and I don't know, it's a big problem because on the one hand, it's a different nationality – I mean generally, not because of the war – it's a different religion, and especially because of the war. There are a lot of tensions, how to say. And to do that to your parents…*

Here we see the intertwinement of ethnic and religious identity, war trauma and family as constitutive relations of segregation. Ethnic and religious differences come to be accentuated in reference to war trauma – perhaps the most vivid aspect of most family histories in Vukovar. Parents are expected to be affected by the way their children relate to the children of ethnic 'others' because the past that was lived by those parents continues to occupy the present. Marija is thus suggesting that entering a romantic relationship with a Serb would be disrespectful to her family's traumatic heritage. If we consider segregation from this perspective, it becomes rather clear that there is conflict at the heart of segregation: the postwar generation is burdened with the responsibility to maintain this conflict since the parents failed to come to a resolution. The students are able to provide very concrete arguments for the continuation of conflict, by affectively engaging with the traumatic memories of their family members and the broader community – through the process of postmemory:

Ana: *Well, hm, I think it's still early for Serbs and Croats to live together. That is, not early, but a lot of questions haven't been resolved, that should be resolved in order to continue coexisting.*

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Sara: *Which questions?*

Ana: *Well, mostly, where the mass graves are. I mean, why introduce Cyrillic*

plates into a town where we still don't know where some of our ancestors are,

and stuff like that.

Ana is referring to perhaps the most delicate issue that the town is currently living with – the question of missing persons, mostly Croatian civilians. Many Croats in Vukovar are unable to forgive the continuing silence on this matter, assuming that some part of the Serbian population is informed about the locations of mass graves which have still not been discovered by the Croatian population. For members of the postwar generation, this notion of hostile secrecy certainly has traumatic effects and makes it difficult not to think in terms of two sides. Ana displays a sense of transgenerational continuity in the experience of trauma by stating that it is "too early" for Serbs and Croats to live together. The trauma is even more intense when family members are struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder and emotional turmoil connected too current discussions around the position of veterans in contemporary political life. Ana describes this in connection to her father:

Me, primarily, because my dad was in the war and I see what he's going

through when all of that is happening in politics, and when they say that the

defenders were peasants so they went to war because they couldn't go to

school. He can't sleep and I see that, how he walks around the house during

the night. And I don't know, when our Serbian neighbor passes the street with

the Serbian flag, where he fought. I see that it's hard for him, and then it's

hard for me.

Ana's fear that the trauma will fade away and be forgotten is connected to preserving the territorial and cultural legacy of the war: waving the Serbian flag represents the refusal to be

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assimilated by the dominant cultural identity and is therefore seen as a threat to this legacy. But Ana's concerns also pertain to the precarity of veteran status in a changing political climate. The idea that 'the defenders' (veterans) went to war because 'they could not go to school' functions here as a representation of attempts at contesting veteran privilege and helps Ana account for the anxiety she and her father share. Ana's position shows compliance with the dominant postwar culture of the city, but the transgenerational exchange of values is not always without disagreement. The difficulties of negotiating subculture values with parent culture and state ideology are clearly addressed by this group of boys:

> Filip: *Hatred is continuously encouraged. All sorts of speeches… which is really bad for young people.*

> Andrej: *Yeah, young people are starting to reject this, let's say, distorted perception…*

> Filip: *And a lot of young people get it from their parents, the hatred.*

> Andrej: *I commend those who show resistance to their parents. There are those whose parents are really hardcore but they're good, like, they won't, they cool it.*

> Marin: *And there are those who are good, but they're afraid of their parents, because they're not allowed to hang out with Serbs, and then they don't socialize. They're not allowed because it's like 'aaah, he's Serbian, what have you got to do with him?' – like respecting their parents, basically.*

This group successfully articulates the subordinated position of youth by describing the power dynamics between children and parents in terms of being "afraid" and "not allowed" to breach ethnic segregation. However, this position yields resistance among youth: some resist their parents, and some resist the cultural imposition of interethnic 'hatred' through nationalist

rhetoric ("all sorts of speeches"). It is important to note that anti-segregationist youth subcultures (represented here by Andrej, Filip and Marin) are more likely to be formed among children whose parents do not insist on segregation as a transgenerational responsibility. The boys themselves "commend" peers who resist nationalist parents, acknowledging the prevailing generational hierarchy in their community.

2.3 Ethnic Mixing and the Normativity of Segregation

Field trips, school recitals and Bread days (the celebration of Earth's yields whereby everyone brings baked goods to display at the school, usually with religious or national symbols on the breads) have proven to be quite a challenge for maintaining a balanced interethnic dynamic in the Economics school. Sabina, the teacher who usually participates in organizing such events, underlined the personal challenge of keeping all 'sides' happy in the process. When I asked why this is so, she replied: "*Because Croats think it should all be in Croatian and there shouldn't be anything specifically Serbian. And for me, that's always tedious. I think that's the hardest thing I encounter. I always try to get moderators from both programs to show that it's a common recital. But then that child from the Serbian program often translates what I wrote to ekavica* [typically Serbian dialect]*, and this bothers some colleagues and students, so they protest that.*" Translating various spoken and written content into ekavica and Cyrillic letters is often regarded as disrespectful, even though its usage within the Serbian program is officially prescribed. According to relatively recent modifications in school policy, Croatian teachers who work with Serbian classes must comply with the rules and write reports in Cyrillic. However, outside of this teaching 'bubble', language becomes the space of tension, insecurity and constant policing. The Serbian students' tendency to use Cyrillic when signing up for cleaning duty or similar activities is described by some teachers as provocative, excluding the possibility that students are simply more comfortable using Cyrillic or that they use it automatically. This traumatized reading of any cultural marker related to Serbian

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identity[14] was particularly visible in the media during protests against Cyrillic plates on Vukovarian public institutions in 2013[15], but has been fueling discussions in school for much longer.

Serbian students are allowed to introduce 'their' culture into the school for as long as they accept that it is not the official culture in the city. Jelena, a student from the Serbian program, described one specific situation where this negotiation proved problematic for both sides: "*There was a recital for Christmas. There was some song, that went Hey, Christmas eve, Christmas eve – a Serbian song – and then there was 'bu!', 'ua!' and all that. And then we all sang with them, and the five of us were clapping, out of 30 people in the room, that is, in the auditorium. And nobody thinks about how those girls who are singing feel.*" Jelena may have intentionally omitted that the song went '*Christmas eve, Serbian Christmas eve*', which provides more context as to why Croatian students reacted with protest and makes it easier to detect which moments represent the perceived challenge to the power hierarchy between Croatian and Serbian students in the school. The fact that markers of Serbian identity come to be regarded as insulting in shared spaces (such as the school auditorium) testifies to the ghettoizing effects of segregation and the mechanisms which hinder cultural exchange.

Living in segregation is not easy for those who cannot identify with one 'side' and who look for alternative ways of relating to others in the community. Ines, a teacher from both programs, described this experience as a fragmentation of the self: "*Sometimes you feel like crying because you're living in that. Because you're constantly exposed to this separation, this severance of your being across different sides, and you can't fight it out as an individual or say anything that would bring the others to reason.*" This experience of fragmentation

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[14] Renata Schellenberg (2014) notes that members of the Croatian population associate Cyrillic with the violent siege in 1991 (16). In my own ethnographic experience, a part of the postwar generation has accepted this association even in relation to spoken language.

[15] One of the news reports on this event can be found on the following link: https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/sprijeceno-postavljanje-ploca-s-cirilicom-u-vukovaru-cetiri-policajca-su-ozlijedena/1066319/.

illustrates the pains of hybrid identifications in an environment where segregation is the norm. But hybridity is not something that can easily be contained: there are always points of interaction in which borders are suspended, and identities blend and shift in the array of youth responses to the fragmenting work of segregation. After Gordana, one of the teachers, told me about a group of Croatian students – members of the far-right Croatian Pure Party of Rights[16], at that – who wanted to learn Cyrillic scripture as a way of bridging the distance between the two ethnic groups, I realized that resistance to normative identity-making could be found even in places I least expected.

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[16] Hrvatska čista stranka prava

Chapter 3. Gender, Memories and Commemoration in Everyday Lives of Postwar Youth

"*All that stuff – your religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and stuff – it's all… like a penis. It's nice to have it, it's nice to be proud, but if you take it out and try to shove it down my throat, we have a problem.*" Is there a better way to finally introduce a major theme of this research – gender, than through the ultimate gendered image constructed by one of the male students I spoke to? Indeed, his usage of the metaphor of the penis is far from accidental – it is rooted in a deep connection between gender and other identity categories. With this in mind, I turn to an analysis of gendered nationalism in official memories and commemorative practices which constitute a large part of the dominant urban culture in Vukovar. I examine the Economics school's yearbook articles as documents of official memorial narratives. In combination with student interviews, these articles may account for the production of collective memory/postmemory in the service of enforcing ethnic boundaries and provide the background for seeing individual (unofficial) memories/postmemories as a possible way of challenging these boundaries.

Growing up in Osijek, around 38 kilometers north-west of Vukovar, I went to schools in which my generation's duty to commemorate the Battle of Vukovar was emphasized almost equally as in Vukovarian schools. Each year on November 18th, the day of commemorating the Yugoslav National Army's occupation of Vukovar, my high school would travel to the city to participate in the memorial procession. There was no attendance sheet but teachers often made moral proclamations to pressure us into going, and moments in which we had to raise our hands to confirm attendance were moments of great tension: it was in those times that we could not help but notice that there was a Serbian student in our class, and that there were some others too, who had Serbian last names (raising or not raising ones hand was a way

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of eliminating the dilemma). Belonging to this latter, ambiguous group, I was relieved that my father was a relatively prominent local military persona, a Vukovarian veteran and therefore 'the face' of Croatian patriotism. And still I felt guilt – what if someone did not know, and this year I decided not to raise my hand? It was important for me to mention casually, as many times as possible, that I will be going with my family by car. My bench mate did not have this option – she lived in a Serbian village and 'strange' words occasionally slipped from her tongue during class discussions (one year, a couple of boys made her cry by writing in Cyrillic on the blackboard and calling out her name[17]). Nobody expected her to participate in the procession because she was a Serb and because this event was not organized with her in mind. Years later, my interviewees tell me that Serbs in Vukovar shut themselves into their houses on November 18th – perhaps the only way to avoid unbearable visibility is to make oneself invisible.

3.1 The Good and the Bad: Memories of Masculine Heroism and Guilt

Throughout the year, Vukovar celebrates or mourns various historical figures and military endeavors from the 1990s, and schools play a key role in organizing commemorations and ensuring student participation. Many activities with the singular goal of remembering the war take place within the school space, most commonly documentary film screenings, lectures, workshops, lighting candles and praying. These activities are known to trigger tensions among the divided youth and represent a challenge to the interethnic balance in the school. McClintock (1993) argues that "the singular power of nationalism has been its capacity to organize a sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass national commodity spectacle" (70). Commemorative events in Vukovar epitomize this notion of mass spectacle, where large groups of people gather in ritual idolization organized around fetish

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[17] This event testifies to the significant differences between contexts. As the only Serb in our class, my friend worked hard to 'pass' as a Croat and the public revelation of her ethnicity became a way of humilliating her. In this case, we could discuss the problems of assimilation rather than segregation.

objects such as national flags, uniforms, and anthems. Commemorative events in Vukovar reproduce ethnic divisions by implicating them in nationalist narratives of heroes and villains. 'Piety' – humility in mourning – which is officially at the center of such events, is often lost in favor of celebrating nationhood and veteran heroism[18]. This can be observed in the Economics school's yearbooks, which document the continuous engagement of the school with commemorations in Vukovar. Going through publications from the past several years, I have discovered that the school has organized visits to wartime memorial sites such as the city hospital, Ovčara[19] and the Memorial Home of Croatian Defenders. Almost each year, a couple of (Croatian) students would write short articles about the visits, workshops etc. which were then published in the yearbook. Regardless of the generation, the content of these articles is more or less the same, as if written according to some template made up of nation-building narratives. They are more accurate in conveying institutional efforts to assimilate youth into nationalist memorial culture (through appeals to transgenerational responsibility), than they are in representing youth responses to this culture[20].

In commemorating the pains and losses of the 1990s, the school faces a challenge having to reproduce the symbolic repertoire that instills and mobilizes national pride among younger generations, while at the same time maintaining the multicultural principles advertised in the segregated model. The school cannot establish a non-discriminatory memorial discourse so long as it follows the official state practices which rely on the ideological binary between Serbs and Croats. This opposition is achieved through the reiteration of pairs like victim/aggressor, hero/enemy and winner/looser, which tend to serve as tools of segregation and nationalist spectacle. Here is an example from the 2011 yearbook: "*The day of*

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[18] It is important to note that the participants of such events do not necessarily accept or reproduce nationalist narratives. Unofficial memories often help individuals to challenge or modify the dominant messages in public commemorations.

[19] A mass grave just outside of Vukovar

[20] Some interviews will show that these efforts can be rather successful, however, I maintain that this success depends on the complex intersections of identities and different levels of memory.

commemorating Vukovarian heroes was marked this year under the slogan 'Vukovar – winner by sacrifice'. This year as well in our school, we remembered with pride all those who were victims and winners in the fight for independence of the Republic of Croatia [...] During the film, words were redundant, only a couple of tears and pride from the heart filled the space of our school." (32). Nationalism, expressed in regular references to 'pride' and 'sacrifice', is the emphasized sentiment in this, and many other texts authored by students and teachers. The event's slogan personifies the city as an implicitly masculine fighter, investing it with a sacrificial consciousness and declaring victory – as if to rub it in for the implied 'losers' whose constitutive place in 'Vukovar', and therefore in the Economics school, is completely denied.

The nationalist, militarized and masculine position of Vukovar as the city 'of heroes' is epitomized by the image of the Water tower, a monumental vertical building which remained erect under heavy bombing (with a Croatian flag at the top). The Water tower is the most prominent symbol of Vukovarian memorial culture, with large holes and traces of shooting on its walls testifying to the persistence of destruction in the city.

Figure 2 The Economics School logo[21]

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[21] Taken from the school's website: http://ss-ekonomska-vu.skole.hr/?news_id=149

In this form, it is represented even in the official logo of the Economics school (figure 2): a drawing of the war-wrecked tower emerges as the shadow of a large letter 'E', which is itself a stylized version of the tower. With such undeniable war connotations and the implication of masculine nationalist pride, I fail to see how the Serbian students are represented by this logo except as the descendants of the perpetrators of destruction.

In an article dedicated to the annual commemoration for the Croatian general Blago Zadro[22], one girl writes: "[...] *we will never forget what a man he was. We will always be thankful for the great sacrifice he has made for our freedom, our city and our Croatia.*" (2014). The figure of 'the defender', the heroic Croatian soldier, is a figure that unites all the ideological elements that follow from the asyndeton '*our* freedom, *our* city, *our* Croatia': 'he' is the fetish object around which the sense of collective belonging is built (McClintock 1993, 71), along with the conviction in national superiority in morality (manifested through sacrifice) and strength (manifested through victory). Even though there were female soldiers who participated in the war, 'the defender' as an ideological construct is always undeniably male, and memorial culture is subsequently a very masculine culture. Stories of heroes who risked their lives for the country are stories about masculine honor and strength, and they are 'sold' as such to the younger population.

The tight association of memorial culture with this idealized model of hegemonic masculinity is the key to its appeal for girls and boys alike, because the values represented by this masculinity – courage, patriotism, loyalty and honor – are considered to be universal values and the basis of national identity. The reproduction of this gendered image of the city in statements issued by student interviewees may not always come from personal conviction (I must consider the possibility that interviewees sometimes provided accounts they judged to be

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[22] Blago Zadro was a Vukovarian military leader who organized the Croatian defense of Borovo naselje (the location of the Economics school) during the battle of Vukovar and was killed in a shooting. He is celebrated for his leadership and courage.

attuned to what I wanted to hear), however, I have spoken with students who display very convincing affective engagement with official and family memories of the war. One of them is Ana, the daughter of a HOS[23] veteran, who described her motivation to participate in the procession on November 18th as follows:

> *That's tightly related to my dad. Him and his friends always wear those black HOS uniforms on that day, and everything they wore before. I don't know, I feel kind of proud of him. And I always love seeing them walking together. And again, if it weren't for him, I probably wouldn't participate in it. Because I wouldn't know what it all means. And this way, I don't know, I always feel proud, I mean, it is 'the fall' of the city, but when I think about it, I don't think about the fact that it fell, but about the fact that they fought for so long, that they saved the entire Croatia, actually, by fighting in Vukovar. So even though I'm sorry for those people, I'm proud because Vukovar managed to withstand for so long, form all the attacks, because it had such fighters who didn't surrender. Everyone says it's a day of sorrow, but I feel proud walking in that procession.*

I use this quote as an opportunity to emphasize that official state memories merge with family memories, and that these involve gendered images. The pride that Ana feels upon seeing her father in a military uniform reflects the recognition of her father as the embodiment of the masculine ideal. This pride is so strong that it overcasts the sorrow that accompanies war trauma, and in those moments of spectacle the 'gains' of war appear to be more important than the losses. This is an example of state ideology successfully making its way into the personal beliefs and feelings of postwar youth, for it is precisely this shift from loss to gain, and from mourning to pride, which characterizes memorial nationalism.

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[23] Croatian Defense Forces, a notorious paramilitary unit (Thomas and Mikulan 2006, 30).

But the intertwinement of national and family history also entails contradictions and challenges to the ideal of 'the defender'. In another part of our conversation, Ana informs me that her father has stated on several occasions that "*everyone who has been in war knows that men piss their pants in fear*". Of course, such a statement reflects the privileged position of the speaker, since one has to occupy the position of ideal masculinity to be able to challenge it without negative consequences. Nevertheless, personal memories transferred within the family prevent the consolidation of state narratives into a singular meaning, and these play a significant part in the formation of postwar youth culture. They allow moments in which veterans are not placed on a pedestal of glory, and in those moments the conflation of 'the defender', the city and the state as a unified institution with equal goals is at least temporarily suspended. It is a different kind of suspension than the one occurring in public discussions between veterans and the government, as well as different veteran groups, where the affirmation of veteran political authority relied on the same hegemonic narratives[24].

Officially, memorial culture is still a militarized culture. Institutions like the *Memorial Home of Croatian Defenders* or the *Memorial Center of Homeland War* are run by the Croatian military, and school visits to these sites tend to be as much about demonstrating the monumental strength of the military as they are about 'piety'. Here is one girl's description of the Memorial Home on Trpinja Road: "*The building has the shape of a firmly clenched fist that symbolizes the strength with which Vukovar defended itself from aggression.*" (2014). The architectural solution of the Memorial Home serves as the most blatant example of the militarization of culture and space in Vukovar, and it appears to be the most appealing and marketable aspect. Tourists from all over the world visit these institutions in order to admire

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[24] I refer primarily to veteran debates in 2014/2015, triggered by the protests of a group of veterans who gathered in a tent in Zagreb demanding improvements of veteran rights and the replacement of the minister of defenders. After 555 days, the tent was moved to Vukovar against the will of the local government and veterans, but only for a brief period (https://www.24sata.hr/news/branitelji-u-vukovaru-bijesni-micite-sator-iz-naseg-grada-472134).

the military proficiency and weapons displayed, and Vukovarian students are no exception. Students often report that "*the tanks were interesting*" or that "*no one left the Memorial Home indifferent, and we recorded our visit by taking a photograph on a tank*" (2014).

The work invested in making memorial culture more appealing to youth extends beyond the suggestion that heroes and tanks are 'cool', as can be observed from the way these tours are conceptualized. In order to ensure the future of commemorative events, organizers often make sure to accentuate the responsibility of new generations to continue these practices. The underlying message that concludes a lot of such gatherings is that members of the postwar generation should never allow for these traumatic events to be forgotten and that they must continue to nurture the memorial culture of the city. Articles from the 2010 yearbook warn us that "*we must not let it fall into oblivion!*" (42) and that "*anniversaries of the deaths of Croatian heroes and more generally the sacrifice of Homeland war should be held more often*" (21).

The postwar generation is invited to remember the truths issued by those who occupy the privileged memorial position – the veterans – the result of which is the systemic discrimination of women and youth (especially, but not exclusively Serbian youth) in political life and the local labor market. This condition was noticeable in interviews, when a lot of the students noted that their mothers were unemployed, doing seasonal work at the seaside[25] or poorly paid work for local food chains, and later confirmed by teachers, who are required to communicate with parents and pay attention to their students' family lives. In contrast, Croatian defenders are mostly secured by their veteran pensions. Even though children from veteran families enjoy privileges in work and education, most young Vukovarians are likely to identify with the precarious position of non-veteran men and women when imagining their

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[25] Working '*the season*' ('na sezonu') refers to temporary employment in the catering industries at the Adriatic coast which soar over the summer months. This option is very popular among the population of Eastern Slavonia, which is an area that suffered industrial and agricultural decline.

future participation in the workforce. They cannot count on being exempt from experiencing the broader issues of life in contemporary Croatia which include a lack of employment prospects for youth (Bilić and Jukić 2014). These shared insecurities could provide grounds for developing relationships of solidarity between different social groups and across imposed divisions, much like the idea of a unitary national body of veterans was deconstructed through 'internal' debates about their contemporary political role.

3.2 Dominant Culture and Youth

School yearbooks are a border genre, meaning that they represent official school politics (and are therefore a product of dominant memorial culture), while at the same time giving a glimpse of youth culture as a space of negotiation and resistance. One section where students are able to introduce their own (unofficial) perspectives is the literary section, where students publish poems and short stories which reflect their concerns. For instance, in the 2017 yearbook, one student writes that "*today I cannot bear that Filip, Vladimir, Tomislav, Lana and Stjepan are separated from Aleksa, Tijana, Nebojša, Bojana and Milica*"[26] (114), while another student writes verses about the 'heritage' of hatred (122). These texts stand in contrast to with moralizing commemorative discourses and to the official idealized image of the school as 'happily' segregated. To some degree, yearbooks capture the contradictions between the dominant memorial culture and youth culture which were more prominent in the interviews.

As I have in part already demonstrated, the assimilation of youth into the dominant culture can be achieved through the fusion of official national history and family memories in the form of postmemory. This process is reflected in the actual practices of young people in Vukovar. Ana mentions verbal conflicts between Croatian and Serbian students in the school, from cursing and displaying controversial symbols to the more banal problem of greeting with

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[26] The first group of names is typically Croatian, while the second one is typically Serbian.

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'bok' ('hello') or with 'ćao' ('ciao'). While 'ćao' is a greeting borrowed from Italian and widely used by young people in other Croatian cities, in Vukovar it is almost exclusively used by Serbs. For Ana, and not only for her, this greeting has negative political connotations:

Sara: *Why is 'ćao' a provocation?*

Ana: *I like to say that Serbs are primitive people* (laughs)*, because, I don't know if you ever read on the internet, like, my brother and I were discussing today, some Croatian web site posted that Mandžukić[27] was elected as the player of the year or something, anyway, and there was a Serbian comment right away 'go Mandžukić, you Serb' – 'brother Serb' or something. And a Croat replies 'well, he's not Serbian, he's a Croat' and begins an argument, where the Serb writes that all Croats are Serbs because all last names that end in -ić, -ać and I don't know, nonsense, are Serbian last names. And it's the same with Serbs in Vukovar – they don't really investigate history and what is what, they brag about being this and that, and so they appropriated the 'ćao', and when you pass through the street and happen to say 'bok' to a Serb, they give you a piercing look as though you said I don't know what.*

Not many students would dare to openly call Serbs a primitive people in front of a researcher, but Ana makes her position clear with ease – what allows her to do so is the reduced distance between immediate experiences of wartime violence, national narratives and her own experience of postmemory. In this folding of an unlived past into the present, Ana identifies with her father (the war hero) and assumes an active role in the ideological reproduction of segregation on the grounds of moral and historical right. She offers a description of what appears to be Serbian 'mentality', a fixed set of cultural traits that constitutes a stereotype – the 'nationalist savage' who dismisses the more 'sophisticated' aspects of culture such as

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[27] Mario Mandžukić, Croatian football player.

history. But it is the claim to history that is crucial in asserting authority in nationalist rhetoric: history comes to mean the truth of belonging and ownership, that which determines who gets to claim territory and local culture as theirs alone. Everything outside of history is considered 'appropriation', even, as Ana suggests, the Serbian greeting 'ćao'. According to the implications of this statement, history is a matter of authenticity, and Serbs are 'not authentic' – this denial of authenticity is a powerful way of silencing those who might offer countermemories about the war in Vukovar.

But the relationship between young people's experiences and dominant culture is a complicated one, and often results in confusion. The experience of Igor, a Serbian student, demonstrates this:

> *I have a lot of friends who like to talk about the war even though they weren't there, who don't like Vukovar, like, they only like their own. Those are mostly Serbs who don't like Vukovar, they have nationalist pictures on their mobile phones and such. And I've met people who post on Facebook, on the day of the fall of Vukovar or whatever, they post statuses against Serbs and then on the next day they can talk to them, they're completely... They change for one day. That's maybe a bit stupid. I mean, if they're gonna be like that, why not at all times?*

Considering the normativity of segregated ethnic identities, it is easy to understand why some young people "change for one day" and decide to perform their ethnic identity in the way they are expected to during commemorations. But the temporary character of this participation in dominant culture shows that young individuals do not fully identify with its values, even if they do feel obligated to participate in the spectacle. This example testifies to the subordinated position of youth in this culture, since they are required to deny personal experiences which are not in accord with official narratives. In this sense, it is not only Serbian youth who are

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silenced by memorial culture, though I must emphasize once again that I found the mistrust and fear caused by the sometimes violent suppression of countermemory to be an especially challenging aspect of my research. In interviewing the small number of Serbian students who agreed to participate, I was afraid to ask direct questions about the war so as not to betray their trust, but I caught a glimpse of countermemory in conversations about November 18th: this date is officially commemorated as the day of the 'fall' of the city, which is why Igor has called it "the fall of Vukovar or whatever". This 'whatever' pertains to its alternative designation as the day of "liberation" (Jelena explicitly worded it). If Vukovar was liberated on November 18th, then today it is occupied. This understanding is the source of the kind of 'not liking Vukovar' that Igor detects among his peers, and it is merely the other, silenced side of memorial culture advanced by Croatian nationalism.

Jelena described the fear that motivates most Serbs to retreat to their houses on November 18th, and recalled situations in which visitors from other parts of Croatia would stop by in Trpinja and urinate on the Orthodox church[28]. External influence in raising the tensions in Vukovar is something that not only Jelena pointed to – teachers and students are often aware of the detrimental consequences of media representations and nationalist spectacles in the city. Filip, Marin and Andrej criticized commemorative practices for betraying the idea of 'piety' and resulting in a nationalist delirium and profit-seeking:

> Filip: *The ways are really bad, because it's making profit, not anymore about memorialization – for the victims and the stuff that happened, instead it's…*
>
> Andrej: *Like, it's popular. Rush hour.*

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[28] The incident in Trpinja (a village next to Vukovar, where Serbs are the major population) is an extreme example of the hostility towards Serbs which is nurtured in mass commemorative gatherings. Even though the perpetrators were not locals, the detrimental consequences of such events are reflected in the life of the local community.

Filip: *It's not about respecting the victims and what happened at all, instead they come and get drunk. Not everyone, but the majority. They come and sing ustaša songs...*

Marin: *They basically trigger. For the whole year it's like, some relationships are developing, Serbs and Croats are socializing, no negative charges, and then come the 18th and it's over. People change immediately and it takes about two months for things to get back in place.*

Filip: *Starting all over again.*

Andrej: *An enchanted circle.*

This image of an enchanted circle captures the conviction that there is no progress in Vukovar, which was articulated by many interviewees as the consequence of memorialization. Despite the profitability of war tourism, constant financial investments in this sector have drained the energy and resources needed for the revival of industry in the city. The successful shoe factory Borovo employed 23000 people before the 1990s, it now employs only 1000 (Čuljak 2015), while large production spaces with broken windows remain empty. What these boys perceive as lack of progress is the result of privileging commemorative labor, which is based on exclusions of groups that are not 'properly' involved with memorial culture – minorities, women, and a large portion of the postwar generation. But progress also means reconciliation: Marin's observation about relationships between Croats and Serbs developing only to be shattered again by an influx of Croatian extremism is a critique of commemorative practices as a tool for maintaining segregation.

Family histories with potential to intervene in official state narratives tend to challenge the ethnicized distinction between the 'good' and the 'bad', but still offer silence as a response to segregation and nationalism. Domagoj told me that his father hardly ever speaks about

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interethnic relations in the city, but that his memories offer a more nuanced picture of the war: "*He showed me, of course, what they did to us, but he told me that Croats also weren't that great, the stuff that happened in Bosnia. I mean, he's fair. He shows that they were bad, but that not all of them were so bad. One Serb saved my grandpa.*" For the most part of our interview, Domagoj chooses to dismiss the relevance of family memories to the way he relates to the community, and yet here he refers to his father as the main role model for the principle 'forgive, but do not forget'. If segregation is the center of the imagined spectrum between forgiving and forgetting, then these two poles represent the two discourses needed to sustain it. The ability of postwar youth culture to rework transmitted memories is so helpful in maintaining this balance that coexistence would hardly be imaginable without it. Young people like Domagoj reinterpret memories to make way for forgiveness: "*I mean, that's what always happens, a couple of old assholes don't get along, so they send other people's children to die at the front for their ideology. I think people slowly started understanding that that's what's happening, and they simply started counteracting those, who are the cause of all that torture and ruin, and not each other.*" This narrative about people being tricked into fighting via ideology goes against the naturalization of conflict and moralizing distinctions between ethnic groups. It invests hope into the idea of community, which is more than can be said about official memorial narratives.

3.3 Resistance to Memory

This analysis is not aimed at dismissing commemorative practices, but it does pose questions about the discursive strategies that these practices entail. Newspaper and yearbook articles, processions, visits to memorial sites – all of them appear to be serving a nationalist purpose, without any regard for the experiences of those who found themselves on the 'bad' side of the nationalist narrative. The absence of a reparative discourse in national and local politics has reflected on the life of the school which could, alongside the media and civil society, provide

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a basis for contesting national memories and the reparation of interethnic relations (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 127). The idea that 'peaceful coexistence' simply stands for 'segregation' has turned from a temporary solution into a permanent response, and attempts at overcoming divisions – for example, the initiative to start an integrated school – have been met with resistance by the local government (Simić Bodrožić 56, 2014). It is no wonder then that schools have decided to stay passive in this regard, accepting the official stance that peace depends on the ability to maintain separated togetherness. Teachers in Vukovarian schools, especially those like Miloš, who works with Serbian students, are able to criticize and question these conditions based on everyday experience:

> *What I have a problem with is that I see that the government and everyone is engaged in making myths. Just like soc-realism was making a mythology after World War II, a myth of a nation, as you* [Vesna] *said – I was not brought up that way, I find it very imaginary, but I can understand some kind of identification on this national basis, but now they're attempting to renew this myth of the nation, of unity, and now they're doing it on account of Homeland war. In principle, I have nothing against that, but as all mythologies, this one will crash down sooner or later. It's dangerous to play with that because new generations will bring about resistance. We are building this, as you called it, 'memorial' culture for them to find identity within. I am not sure how children react to that, but in school, even in the Gymnasium, I can see that this mythology has caught some roots – so they do see it as something of their own. In the Serbian program, children perceive it as extremely negative. They almost feel as if it's directed against them.*

For Miloš, the 'myths' are a way of imposing identities on youth, and he anticipates extreme reactions among Serbian youth as a form of resistance to the constant labeling of heroes and

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villains. He describes the normative production of postmemory (with nationalist narratives of war "catching roots" among youth) and its antagonizing and discriminatory effects. It is only logical that Serbian students reject a nationalist mythology in which they are made to occupy the position of the guilty party. I myself have noticed this happens in commemorative situations at school, for instance, Ana recalled a girl from the Serbian program cursing her 'ustasha mother' and slamming the door during a candle-lighting program on November 18th. Despite commemorative activities often being centered around 'honoring the victims', over the years, the meaning of 'victim' has completely consolidated into 'Croatian victim' and it is always accompanied by its shadow pair 'Serbian aggressor'. Rare are the occasions in which all victims of war are placed at an even level of piety, and when Croatian and Serbian citizens are invited to contemplate their life *together* as the that which was lost during the war. The extreme reaction of the Serbian who cursed the praying crowd might have been a way to communicate the frustration with the ethnicized discourse of victimhood and aggression so often encountered in such events, especially since Ana noted that reactions like these are common in all (such) situations. Memorial culture, as it is currently practiced, seems to be a mechanism which draws young people into an 'enchanted circle' of accusations and obsolete labels such as 'ustasha' and 'chetnik'[29]. History is revived and replayed in the postmemorial imaginary constructed within the family, school and the city.

When it comes to educational institutions, this process begins at an early age, with segregation in kindergartens, slowly building meanings throughout primary and secondary education. Iva, a girl who has had trouble fitting into the polarizing categorization Croat/Serb (being a child from a mixed marriage), expressed very critical ideas about the role of commemoration in her primary education:

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[29] The term 'ustasha' ('ustaše') refers primarily to Croatian profascists in World War II, while 'chetniks' (četnici) mainly signify the supporters of Greater Serbia (Midlarsky 2011, 225).

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Iva: *Well, I don't know, maybe when my primary school changed its name to OŠ Siniša Glavašević, and then they explained who he was, and… I remember the Day of the Fall of Vukovar, we would also memorialize each day and we would meet in the hall and watch war movies, us 9-year-olds would watch the consequences of war and granading. Which I think is… 'Go on kids, write stories about the war, write stories about the city'. I really don't think we needed that. And there were cases when teachers would, if we didn't participate in the procession, tell us 'shame on you, how could you not go?'. I think a kid in this town really doesn't need that. That's why we're growing up the way we are.*

Sara: *The way you are as in…*

Iva: *Unhappy, apathetic and passive – 'what's the use in fixing, look at what the situation was'. Because every year it's the same. In high school, there isn't that much poisoning, like it used to be. I mean, we light a lantern and I think that's okay. But showing war movies and leading a group of 12-year-old kids to the hospital, to Ovčara… Okay, the tanks were interesting to us* (laughs), *but the other stuff wasn't necessary. I think it should be a free choice, whether we want to see it or not when we're older. That sort of thing. I think it's too much for a child.*

The term 'poisoning' struck me as daring, since this was the first interview (later followed by others) in which someone had expressed disagreement with the way memory was being enacted in Vukovar. The question of 'age-appropriate' information about traumatic events is an issue that has not been addressed by any institution involved in commemorative processes, which only testifies to the systemic neglect of 'youth' as a position that bears certain specificities in relation to the dominant culture. No effort has been dedicated to the

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understanding of the effects that images, sounds and words directed at instilling trauma in Vukovarian youth have had on their emotional and social development. Even less interest was shown for whether and how children and young people want to be involved in commemorative processes. Iva's conclusion that her generation was brought up to be "unhappy, apathetic and passive" through their immersion in memorial culture is significant because it brings memorial culture into correlation with constructions of youth as passive and disinterested, "because every year it's the same".

It is no wonder then that a lot of student interviewees show resistance to memory and the refusal to identify with the traumatic experiences of previous generations. Marko, a Croatian student, formulated it as follows: "*I don't want to be bothered with stuff like that. I'm not interested in it. I know it happened, and it's over. The parents participated in all of it, but it doesn't really intrigue me.*" Gender is surprisingly absent in the term 'parents', as if Marko is avoiding a possible invitation to identify with those who participated in the war through the usual reference to masculinity. This is not to say that Marko is subverting hegemonic masculinity – after all, at one point he complains that fights between young men are always about ethnicity and "*never about girls*", thus mirroring a normative understanding of gender relations whereby girls are constructed as passive/objects that boys need to fight over – but he is pursuing a model of masculinity which does not rely on ethnic segregation and war memories.

Unfortunately, 'adult' political actors have not yet admitted that segregation and nationalist narratives of war trauma are contributing to a decrease in the quality of life in Vukovar. As Vesna, a teacher in the Serbian program, compellingly stated:

> *There isn't a single official position that would put an end to it, I mean, I wrote that, I don't remember to whom anymore, that we don't need coexistence in Vukovar – we need existence [life]. The talk of coexistence is already outdated.*

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We need a normal life – enough with the war, and that Water Tower and all.

What's annoying is, they're building a monument city. They should be oriented

toward young people, but conflicts happen all the time […]

I do not want to insist too heavily on the kind of opposition between memorialization and youth visible in Vesna's statement, whereby one necessarily overrides the other (I believe I have shown by now that there are co-constitutive relations to be considered), but I do want to emphasize the relevance of this type of discourse in future chapters: ideas about youth as a force of progress and futurity often motivate young people in Vukovar to establish antinationalist practices.

The issue of memory, countermemory and commemoration is the foundational issue for looking into the culture of postwar youth in Vukovar. So far, I have argued that the dominant culture in Vukovar is the memorial, militarized patriarchal culture, organized around the discursive figure of the Croatian 'defender' and the collective gendered fantasy of 'the city of heroes'. Even with the presence of female veterans, this culture sistematically excludes women from local public life, and this exclusion is reproduced in the town's economic structure, making it difficult for women and youth to find adequately paid work and participate in the city's culture on equal grounds.

Youth is occupies a particularly complex position in relation to patriarchal veteran culture in Vukovar. While it may be at the center of commemorative efforts to instill a sense of responsibility toward the nation, youth remains a subordinated group in the overall power network of the city: young people are usually positioned as passive consumers of memory, through commemorative practices which take place in schools and contain attractive narratives of bravery and honor. In contrast, youth experiences and opinions that contradict official narratives about Vukovar seem to have no place in the town's public space. Åhäll and Shepherd (2012) note that: "*Within the challenging fluidity of post-conflict environments*

which are nothing but contexts where the politics of war continue through different means,
the youth would need to show great 'navigational skills' in order to respond to such power
dynamics" (209). The difficulties that postwar generations face in negotiating with the
patriarchal veteran culture of Vukovar are significant, but their 'navigational skills' can be
observed in the way 'youth' is deployed as a discourse of novelty and resistance.

Chapter 4. Youth Identities and the Emergence of Youth Culture

I now turn to a closer examination of the culture of postwar youth – its "maps of meaning" which emerge through patterns of social relations (Hall and Jefferson 1993, 10). While youth identities may be constructed through previously existing categories of age, gender, ethnicity and class, they are far from fixed in a single point – they are characterized by fluidity and shifts which make negotiation with the dominant culture possible. I begin by providing an intersectional perspective on the formation of youth identities in Vukovar, arguing that this process is influenced by postwar conditions and partially determined by the normative identity-making of segregation. However, certain youth practices provide space for challenging those norms, enabling the emergence youth culture as a platform for resistance and negotiation with the dominant culture of the city. I hope to show that this space is created through neotribal border-crossing, subcultures, hybrid identities and unofficial memories.

4.1 Masculinity and Ethnic Conflict

As I have argued in the previous chapter, Vukovarian youth was brought up by a distinctly male urban culture built around male heroic figures and masculine metaphors of Vukovar – as both a city 'of heros' and itself 'a hero' that sacrificed everything but its masculinity (represented by the Water tower) for the defense of its country. These images of hegemonic masculinity are offered and often accepted within youth culture as the ideal of masculine adulthood. The most extreme effects of attempts to embody this ideal can be observed in physical conflicts on an ethnic basis which mostly occur between young males in Vukovar.

An incident that attracted a lot of media attention happened in February 2016, when three male Serbs at the ages of 19, 22 and 29 battered and pointed a gun at a 20-year old male

Croat[30]. According to news reports, the young Croat was asked whether he is a fan of *Crvena Zvezda* (a Serbian football team) and his negative reply motivated the attack. The incident is most easily read as an act of football hooliganism, but it is more complicated than that since the boy who was attacked was not a member of a football gang, in fact, he immediately indicated that he was not interested in sports. The question might have been a way of identifying the boy as a member of the 'enemy' ethnic group, or perhaps it was a rhetorical strategy of revealing the 'reason' for punishment. In any case, the incident was recounted by several Croatian students I interviewed, and it can be contextualized at the intersection of ethnicity and gender as an unfortunate consequence of the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. All official state narratives emphasize the superiority of Croatian masculinity in relation to Serbian masculinity: the 'winners' of the Battle of Vukovar are Croatian men who now enjoy economic and social privileges which stand in contrast to the difficult conditions that other groups in the city are facing. It is no wonder then that Ana, who remembers the event, linked the motivation for the attack with the desire to (re)assert masculine strength: "*Maybe it's that – they're guys so they want to show they're tough. I don't know.*" More reason to believe that the competition of masculinities was a significant aspect in this event can be found in the way that Croatian news reports tried to 'redeem' the boy that was beaten, by repeating that the attackers were unable to knock him to the ground due to his physical strength, and that it was only after a gun was pointed at his head that the he was forced to lay down[31]. The implication of such details in the narrative is that the young Croatian man would have been perfectly capable of putting up a fight had the attackers not had an 'unfair advantage', thus disenabling the reader from positioning him as the 'helpless victim' (which would be a feminized position).

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[30] Here is an example of one of the news reports: https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/crna-kronika/trojica-navijaca-zvezde-stavili-mu-pistolj-na-glavu-i-tukli-ga-palicom-prebijen-mladi-vukovarac-gradonacelnik-hrvati-su-bijesni.../101065/

[31] https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/napad-na-mladica-u-vukovaru-jedan-delija-u-pritvoru-dvojica-pustena-slijedi-zalba-na-odluku-suca-svu-trojicu-terete-za-pokusaj-teskog-ubojstva/101212/

Encouraged by the dominant culture, youth continues to rely on gendered discourses of war between Croats and Serbs as a reference point for constructing their own intertwining gender and ethnic identities. I certainly do not want to essentialize the connections between masculinity and violence (Özerdem and Podder 2015, 7) in gendered images of war, so I must differentiate between nationalist myths and their gendered consequences in everyday lives of Vukovarians from the overall gender dynamics in relationships between individuals. A lot of young men in Vukovar prove their masculinity by following the models offered through war narratives, but some openly reject those models and look for alternative ways to construct their masculine identity. For example, despite being the son of a Croatian veteran, Marko rejects nationalist expressions of masculinity. His participation in a group sport which includes teamwork between Serbs and Croats has enabled him to establish a masculine youth identity through male camaraderie and collaboration in competition: as a football player, he has chosen to prioritize male friendship and solidarity in the game and on the road (teams often travel across the country) over ethnic or age differences. It is, however, important to differentiate between the masculine ideal of sportsmanship and the masculine ideal constructed through football fan culture, since the latter is associated with often violent nationalism[32]. Marko's example is perhaps not very common, but it is an instance in which gender identity overrides ethnic identity.

But the cultural construction of masculinity as protective and heroic is a patriarchal ideal which extends beyond nationalist narratives and can be found in popular culture, religion and family life as well[33], but it intersects with the dominant construction of post-conflict space as dangerous space (where conflict is far from resolved). In this sense, the naturalization of

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[32] For reference, see Hopkins and Treadwell (2014).
[33] There is a large body of literature which supports this, but I recommend Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), Daly (1993) and Sparks (1996).

masculinity as inherently protective becomes more prominent when there is a perceived need for it. According to Ana, boys jump at the opportunity to protect girls:

> Ana: *Well, okay, boys are always kind of, I mean wherever you go, they like to stand out, brag, they like to protect us and such. But I don't know, in the main things like school, sport, competitions, I think we're all very equal. There isn't any preeminence. It's just that boys are always a bit more rebellious, and we are a bit calmer.*
>
> Sara: *Why do you think you're calmer?*
>
> Ana: *Genes, I guess. I don't know. I mean, it also depends on the person, but it's mostly the case. And when we go out, there are a lot of fights in Vukovar, and then they're always pretending like they will protect us and such.*

But even in this case, Ana negotiates with the dominant culture. She may be naturalizing normative gender relations by referring to genetic conditioning – boys stand out, girls are calm. This patriarchal division of gender 'traits'is further supported by nationalist appeals to the different roles men and women fill in the service of the nation, as well as by religious heteronormativity and the narrative of 'God, the father' (Daly 1993). Yet Ana concludes by acknowledging the performativity of gender: the boys are always "pretending" to protect the girls. Almost the exact same thing is happening in the following statement by Marija: "*There has to be that role that they're stronger, okay, that's in their nature to be like, to play the head of the home, that sort of thing is in their nature, in a way.*" It is clear from the tone of these statements, and the usage of words like 'pretending', 'role', and 'play', that neither of the girls is convinced in the natural character of this gender dynamic, especially considering the dominant position that Ana has in her school and religious youth group or Marija's academic success. Feminist and postfeminist influences on global youth culture are present in

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the way these girls avoid the positioning of their gender as passive and in need of male protection, but at the same time, both of them conceptualize gender as a binary division of natural character traits and reinforce the idea that masculinity is about strength and physical conflict. Their classmate Domagoj is less deterministic when he humorously criticizes the stereotype of female helplessness in relation to masculine aggression:

> *I think society is too permissive toward girls. For example, you have two men – one hits the other, and the other can hit back, right? An eye for an eye. Now, a girl hits a man, and the man hits her back – who will be condemned by the entire society? The man, because he is attacking the 'weaker' sex - but she started it. And by doing this, they're just supporting her bad behavior, because she knows she can do it without consequences. And I think they're being robbed of that experience. We, men, say something to another man, he, of course, goes 'pufff' in the face. And on the way home, your head clears and you think 'hm, maybe I was an asshole'.*

Rather than believing that young men actually hit each other on a regular basis and cannot wait to extend that privilege to girls, I read this as a protest against the polarizing discourses of masculinity and femininity which produce obstacles for more egalitarian male-female friendships. Even though it is a distinctly male perspective (imposing stereotypical male behavior as universally good), it contradicts nationalist tendencies which have erased women's agency from postwar memorial culture, as well as the binary 'role' model of gender provided by his female classmates.

4.2 Postwar Girlhood and the Reproduction of the Nation

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) have shown that women are often positioned as the reproducers of boundaries between ethnic or national groups on a biological as well as

cultural scale (9). In this sense, nation states deploy gender in strategies of population control which maintain the separation of ethnic groups and encourage the growth of the dominant ethnic group (ibid. 8). The current Croatian government has introduced a number of financial incentives and reforms[34] aimed at population increase, with plenty of background support by religious institutions and civil society fighting for the abolition of LGBT and abortion rights. Increasing discussions around so-called 'gender ideology', the marriage referendum[35] and protests against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention[36] are only some examples of the growing pressures on women and sexual minorities in Croatia today. Since depopulation is foregrounded as the main source of economic problems in the country, birth rates and emigration represent burning topics in public discussions. 'Age' emerges as an important category in relation to both, so most demographers speak of 'young' population emigrating the state (Pokos 2017, 23) or of the aging of fertile female population (Wertheimer-Baletić 2003, 36). With such high political stakes at the intersection of age and gender, youth is invited to contemplate their responsibility for the reproduction of the nation. This sense of responsibility is enforced through narratives about the struggle for nationhood and the sacrifice that previous generations have made for independence – narratives that are uniquely incorporated into Vukovarian culture. With ethnic segregation in the city, postwar youth is forced to negotiate the responsibility of maintaining static identities with the needs or desires that might lead to crossing such borders. The tensions that emerge from these contradictions can be easily observed in the way young people – girls especially – imagine their futures.

> Ana: *I don't know, I just love Vukovar. Regardless of everything, I really love*
> *it, I guess because I was born and grew up here, but I don't know, I'd love to*
> *be able to return to Vukovar and continue living here. My favorite thing is that*

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[34] https://vlada.gov.hr/print.aspx?id=22819&url=print
[35] The referendum about placing the definition of marriage as 'the union between a man and a woman' into the constitution: (http://referendumobraku.uimeobitelji.net/)
[36] http://www.istinaoistanbulskoj.info/sto-je-istanbulska-konvencija

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there are things for young people, if they wanted to elevate, and there are a lot of good people Vukovar, as far as… I'll seem rude (laughs) *– as far as Croats are concerned, I think there are a lot of good people. They're just… I think there are honest people. Because the people that came back to Vukovar, it sort of comes from the family, they're kind of different, I don't know. And the worst… Well, there really isn't any work. My mom has been looking for a job for 4 years, and she managed to get a job in a small shop, which closed after about 3 months. And, for example, I'd love to stay in Vukovar, but I wouldn't want my children to grow up in Vukovar* (laughs)*. Because I don't want them to have to go through all the thinking that I keep going through – how to do this or that, am I allowed to say this now, will someone attack me, do I have a place to go to other than to listen to cajke* [turbofolk music]*, will there be a fight? I don't want my kids to go through that one day. That's what I don't like, but again, I would want to stay.*

Attachment to urban space is here closely tied to the concept of potential migration: the relationship between 'possibility' and 'choice' of returning to live in Vukovar is established in reference to ethnic conflict and the gendered consequences of postwar economy. Ana somewhat apologetically admits that her idea of community in Vukovar excludes members of the Serbian minority – she emphasizes 'choice' while considering removing herself (and potentially her future children) from the challenges of balancing the fragile dynamics of interethnic relations, which would entail moving to a more ethnically homogenous area, and supposedly one less associated with memories of war. On the other hand, she expresses the desire to remain in her (segregated) community – a community which is indirectly defined through the transgenerational sharing of war trauma and memories of refuge and return ("Because the people that came back to Vukovar, it sort of comes from the family, they're

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kind of different, I don't know"). The desire to stay is then contrasted to economic limitations that constitute 'possibility' – Ana identifies with her mother and expects to experience similar difficulties in finding permanent employment in Vukovar. Her classmate Marija was more explicit about the gender dimension of this condition: "*But in modern times, it's expected that you cook and clean and work, raise children and go to college. You have to manage it all. For example, while I was in school, I studied more, I cleaned less and so on. Now I clean more, and because mom left, right, to work at the seaside, and like, it's all manageable, but not all at once.*" The fact that Marija's mother had to move to a relatively distant part of the country in order to find work is here casually slipped into a discussion about the postfeminist dilemmas of 'having it all'[37]. It is clear from her complaint that migration is gendered and followed by a reaffirmation of the gendered labor division – the mother was compelled to move to a different part of the country in order to participate in the job market, and the daughter was 'left' with housework. In a lot of my interviews, women suddenly emerge as the main active and mobile figure of the neoliberal order and a reference point for the postwar generation in describing the living conditions in Vukovar. Among the Croatian population, young people know that their future cannot be captured by the presents of their fathers, who have earned (or at least claimed) their passivity on account of the war, and whose privilege is based on the symbolic absence of movement in time and space[38]. Of course, memorial institutions offer jobs for young people as well as veterans, but with more precarious conditions and lesser wages (not to mention discrimination based on ethnicity). Even though there is no reason to believe that the gendered inequalities in employment opportunities among the parent generation will be institutionally transferred to the children, this distinction

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[37] This discussion pertains to capitalist appropriations of feminism as a strategy of incresing demands for women's productive and reproductive labor. For a comprehensive overview of the debates on neoliberal feminism see Budgeon (2015).

[38] Memorialization means attachment to the past, but this attachment is conditioned upon the attachment to space – the defenders' refusal to abandon the town during the war is mirrored by the refusal to abandon it in postwar times, despite economic downtrend and painful memories.

is already built into the disadvantages that young people anticipate in their ventures into the job market. Imagining migration is part of preparing oneself for a precarious future:

Sara: What *do you think about this need for mobility, and the fact that there's no work here?*

Jelena: *There definitely isn't. Unless it's a minimal wage job that doesn't pay. So people literally work for free, and aren't getting money. So I don't see a future here regarding work.*

The need for crossing national or regional borders in search of work stands in contrast to the biopolitical need to maintain ethnic borders: women may sometimes be first in line as subjects of mobility, but they are also constructed as reproducers of the nation. To illustrate just how strong the imperative of segregation is in forming ideas about what kinds of relationships are acceptable for some young girls, I offer a section from my conversation with Marija:

Marija: *Yeah, there's no communication between Serbs and Croats. I mean, maybe on a night out, but on the hallways rarely. It's the same with this girl from the Gymnasium, a friend, she also says there's no interaction. But outside of school, there is. There's everything, even relationships between Serbs and Croats.*

Sara*: I heard that there have been problems in this respect.*

Marija: *Well, yeah. Really, I would never do it. I don't know, him too – a friend from class hooked up with one girl, whoa. I don't know.*

Sara: *What do you mean, you wouldn't?*

Marija: *Oh, because I sort of hold on to my own, and I don't know, it's a big problem because on the one hand, it's a different nationality – I mean*

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generally, not because of the war – it's a different religion, and especially because of the war. There are a lot of tensions, how to say. And to do that to your parents…

Sara: *How important of a factor is religion for you?*

Marija: *For me it's quite important. Because it's something, when you look at it – you will date this person now, maybe one day you will want to get married and have children, and look, how will your kids say 'lijepo' or 'lepo'* [nice, beautiful]*, which Church will they go to, like, you get it.*

In the first part of this section, Marija explains how effective segregation in school is – while it may not always be sustainable in other spaces, there is rarely any interaction between Serbs and Croats in the hallways of her school (the Economics school), as well as her friends school (the Gymnasium). Other areas of social life such as nightlife and extracurricular activities (mainly sports) are less rigid since there is no formal segregation: separation can be ensured by choosing where to go out for a cup of coffee since there are plenty of cafés to choose from, but nightclubs and sports clubs are scarce and thus gather Croatian and Serbian youth together. According to Marija, the consequences of this interethnic communication outside of school can be so transgressive that "even" romantic relationships between members of the two ethnic groups occur. After I pointed to my familiarity with cases where such relationships were perceived as a problem[39], Marija responded with absolute understanding and acceptance of these conditions – she herself would never enter such a relationship and finds attempts by her peers perplexing[40]. In providing a reason for this position she refers to three major institutions that rely on the logic of segregation: the nation, the family and the Catholic Church. According to this logic, "nationality" is a category that already excludes the

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[39] Teenage romances have instigated clashes within families, sometimes involving parents threatening to 'kick' their children out oft he house.

[40] Note the "whoa".

possibility of Serbs and Croats forming relationships that could potentially lead to reproduction and subsequent dissolution of distinct ethnic identities. Ethnic separation is there "not because of the war" (here it is naturalized), but "especially because of it" (here it is contextualized via postmemory). The question of language is invoked as a point in which choosing between 'lepo' and 'lijepo'[41] means choosing between Serbian and Croatian identity – a choice that seems to guarantee the overriding of one over the other. Religious belonging works in a similar way, adding to the argument of significant cultural difference between Croats, who are mostly Catholic, and Serbs, who are mostly members of the Orthodox Church. Finally, family is referred to with particular feeling: the statement "*to do that to your parents...*" demonstrates the particular sense of transgenerational responsibility which is transferred through postmemory. Marija is able to 'remember' the pain that her parents felt during the war, and therefore anticipates the pain that her failure to abide the norms of segregation would inflict upon them. All three of these institutions rely on policing youth identities along the intersections of gender and ethnicity.

It is significant that the two Croatian female students – Ana and Marija – connected memories of war with the future of their children. Ana does so when she speaks about her future in Vukovar and not wanting her children to have to think about ethnic conflict, implying that she would want her children to grow up in a predominantly 'Croatian' community. These two girls already think of themselves (and they are invited to do so) as future reproducers of their ethnic and religious group – and they consider it their responsibility to ensure the homogeneity of this group. They also tend to emphasize motherhood in referring to women around them, for instance, Marija admires her hairdresser having "a family and a carrier at 25". This type of reasoning is supported by the messages communicated in their religious group called *The Youth of Saint Francis*, where heteronormative notions of the role of youth

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[41] Croatian and Serbian version of 'beautiful'.

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in society are reaffirmed. According to Marija, membership lasts until marriage, meaning that in this context the category of youth itself is defined in relation to the heterosexual family – one stops belonging to 'youth' as soon as one enters marriage. Subsequently, preparation for starting a family is emphasized as one of the constitutive processes of youth, which needs to be regulated through various mechanisms, the most prominent of which is the rhetorical positioning of 'traditional' family values as 'under attack' by liberal culture. Marija and Ana both reproduce this discourse when they talk about the influence of popular culture and the media on their peers. Marija does this in connection to family life:

> *Through religion, through your attitude, you have to stick to family. For example, I have a normal family, I want what's best for them. Someone has a bad family, so what can they do… Basically, for me, the church is good, religion holds you together. Because it wants what's best for you, although a lot of young people reject this. Because maybe they think it's old-fashioned, I don't know, because it's imposed, like those movies, how are teenage movies structured? They give you a popular, like, a party – and what do they do at parties? Actually, they drink and do drugs at parties. You know. And in that article, I read that they try to manipulate young people, the satanists – they don't want older people, because older people already have formed opinions and it's harder to win them over than the younger ones.*"

The first few sentences refer to a definable 'normal' family – which comes up in other parts of the interview as the heterosexual family with children and both parents – as the essential and idolized form of affiliation. In opposition to this image is the lost, easily manipulated youth (targeted by 'satanists' due to their lack of agency and capacity for resistance) at risk of failing to fulfill the ultimate achievement of forming a 'normal' family. The promise of this achievement is especially relevant to Marija, who complains about the pressure she felt before

she 'discovered' religious life, pointing out that she felt she needed to be 'perfect' all the time. Marija's anxiety resonates with issues around neoliberal girlhood and unsustainable ideas of success that educational systems often impose on girls (O'Flynn and Epstein 2005, 192). This pressure is even higher in conditions of economic precarity for youth and women in postwar Vukovar. In contrast to the insecurities caused by all these issues, the Church promises stability with its clear rules and guidelines for a good life. In Marija's words: "*Then I started going every Sunday and I realized that the church wants us good, the commands and everything, what they tell you, you know – for example, don't have sex before marriage and stuff – that it's good for you.*" Even though both girls conveyed a feeling of empowerment through religion, I cannot overlook the fact that the rules of the Church are largely centered around their reproductive role, which can result in a different kind of pressure than the one related to women's position in the labor market.

4.3 Doing youth identity, undoing segregation

In the previous sections of this thesis, I have analyzed the postwar conditions in which youth identities in Vukovar are formed, showing the extent to which young people have accepted the norms of patriarchal memorial culture. Even there, it is possible to see that postwar youth practices are not fully aligned with the demands of the dominant culture in Vukovar, producing tensions and contradictions. The remaining sections will focus on youth culture as a response to the culture of commemoration and segregation, manifested through instances of neotribalism, antinationalism, hybridity and postmemory. I intend to show that youth-cultural spaces can be produced through every-day practices which include socializing in cafés, cyber networking, subculture groupings and carefully conceptualized educational projects which mobilize youth culture as a discursive construct with critical and reparative potential.

In discussing the meaning of postwar youth culture, student interviewees often referred to leisure time in order to draw the line between childhood and youth, while also bearing

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specificities in relation to adults. An important symbolic place in the discourse of youth is given to cafés, or 'coffee' [42] for short, where adolescents establish and deepen peer relationships, form and break alliances, gain recognition, or simply joke around and discuss topics that may not come up in other contexts. All this makes cafés public places where youth identities are negotiated and where youth culture is not so restrained by strict regulations and boundaries.

As sites of power, cafés are also ethnically divided (usually according to who owns which place): there are two cafés in the proximity of Economics school – Serbian students frequent Piramida (the Pyramid) and Croatian students go to Trokut (the Triangle). While segregation is quite successfully materialized in these spaces, the symbolic function of coffee places as sites of youth culture allows an occasional bending of these boundaries. Ethnic segregation may temporarily collapse in favor of forming neotribal alliances among youth. One such moment was recounted by Jelena:

> Jelena: *We were in Piramida for the entire day. How the story goes, Piramida is Serbian, Trokut is Croatian, it was always like this. But no, we gathered our things and went to Trokut, we were there, joking around. We were accepted and everything was really okay, and then this one guy, who has wanted to kill us all from the first day, that's what he said, approached us, dead-waisted, and started singing Pevaj Srbijo, Dragana Mirković [43] and all that. And we accepted him, we talked about everything, we never mentioned the war until he started. He said 'I love you Serbs', but he hates us when he sees us when he's sober. And then, since he was left alone, everyone went their own way, he came over to us, we bought him a beer, I mean, it's not like that matters, but we took*

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[42] The same aspect of youth culture is documented by Hromadžić (99).
[43] A Serbian turbofolk singer.

him in, we bought a round, talked to him, joked around, laughed and all. Then

he left, and we were like 'okay, the guy has to go home', and on the same day,

after he sobered up, we were at the Vukovar market headed to catch a bus, and

he's coming, and a friend had a horn and was honking with it, and he's like

'are you Serbs always this loud?'. We look at him, like, don't you know us, and

he's like 'no'.

Jelena's story about innocence, insecurity and disappointment draws some of its elements from a coming of age genre. In the beginning, its characters are invested with the hope of a future in which friendship between Serbs and Croats is possible. By stressing that "we took him in, we bought a round", Jelena demonstrates the desire to establish this unlikely relationship, simultaneously assuring me that this is not a story about one-sided generosity ("I mean, it's not like that matters"). The Croatian boy approaches the group as soon as he is abandoned by his own friends, perhaps seeking to prolong the ritual of 'being young'. Their moment of sharing coffee is also a moment of cultural exchange, especially visible in part where the Croatian boy sings Serbian turbofolk songs. Even after he sobers up and pretends not to recognize the group, the fact of this neotribal 'breach' of segregation remains a demonstration of the way a shared youth identity can complicate ethnic relations. In this sense, the sobering up and leaving the café represents the re-establishing of borders, a return to the 'adult' world which still is not fully accepted by Jelena and her peers. In their case, it may take more disappointments before youth identity is overridden by ethnic identity, but there is also the possibility of neotribal connections growing into more stable bonds.

A second prominent element through which members of the postwar generation assert a sense of their own distinct culture is their relationship to technology. Students who participated in this research are mostly graduates and no longer minors, representing the generation that was born in the years immediately after the war: this group tends to position itself in between the

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'old' order of things which favors physical interaction and the outdoors, and the 'new' frantic dependence on gadgets and virtual reality that they detect among generations younger then themselves. In this sense, they can claim what they perceive to be the best of both worlds as the basis of their culture and abilities to engage with their environment critically:

Andrej: *We're kind of more open-minded. Our parents are more conservative, they have firm beliefs, and we're open to everything.*

Filip: *What difference… They're limited to the media and all that.*

Marin: *Yes, that too. What they see on TV – that's how it is.*

Filip: *That's the truth, yeah.*

Andrej: *Depends on the person.*

Marin: *Yeah, but most of them.*

Sara: *And you are more critical?*

Andrej: *Yeah, quite critical, and we think a bit deeper.*

Sara: *Why is that so?*

Andrej: *Experience.*

Marin: *We're online more.*

Andrej: *Yeah, more internet.*

In this part of the conversation, the group of boys draws a distinction between their parents' attachment to 'old' media (television) associated with 'serving' content, and their own attachment to the internet as an individualized space of 'choosing' content. In their relationship to technology, young people accredit themselves with more agency than their parents, which represents a shift from how youth is positioned and positions itself in relation

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to other areas of social life. At the same time, members of this generation express nostalgia for 'old-fashioned' interactions and friendships that entail playing outside and getting your hands dirty, and see younger generations as deprived of these valuable experiences. In this sense, there is a perceived cultural distance between youth born in the late 1990s and youth born in the 2000s. Ana describes this as an ongoing process: *I don't know, when I look at my sister – she's 4 years younger than me – the two of us had completely different childhoods. Because mom and dad are also trying to influence her, as they did us, but her life is practically reduced to her phone and being on YouTube and Instagram, so I think it started before our generation, but it's developing much more now.*" What Ana describes is a process that is beyond the control of family members or the local community, the increasing profiling of a global youth which is turning itself toward new versions of reality and subsequently building value systems that differ from those built through state-making projects and schooling. It is worthwhile to consider the potentials of technology in imagining alternatives to dominant culture. For one thing, I was quite impressed with the ideas that student interviewees expressed in describing their online activities, such as the example provided by Domagoj:

> *Well, there is… Do you know Reddit? You know those writing prompts? There's a topic and then people write about it. There was this topic I found really interesting, how like, people are the most resistant creatures in the galaxy, but they don't understand it – they think 'we're, like, normal', but the catch is that all the other alien species live on planetary equivalents to the Garden of Eden. And we're here where we have hurricanes, volcanoes, bacteria, viruses, everything that can easily exterminate the entire civilization. And then in the end, some are stupid enough to start a war with humans, and you can imagine how that ends. The thing is, I've read the equivalent to the*

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Lord of the Rings, and I haven't even gone through one tenth of it. There are multiple authors working on it, and all of them are connecting the stories, intertwining them from multiple perspectives – several different people, so…

This type of collaboration between different people, resulting in "multiple perspectives" being brought together, is not a situation that can easily be encountered in an ethnically segregated city. Their active participation in internet communities allows youth to develop skills which are often hindered in their immediate environment, particularly the ability to see togetherness in plurality, and hybrid identities, as a sustainable way of life.

Despite the fact that segregation between Croatian and Serbian youth does exist on the Internet – there are 'Croatian' and 'Serbian' sites on social media, making it possible for each to keep to 'their own' – the boundaries of cyberspace are much more malleable since its purpose is to connect otherwise distant communities and individuals. Andrej, Filip and Marin, members of the 'brewing' subculture, recognized the potential of sharing photographs of their antinationalist street art[44] on social media and have so far been successful in attracting public attention:

Andrej: *There's a photo on Facebook. One of the guys is Serbian so the photo is even more striking. That photo is also a kind of 'fuck you'. It got a lot of attention, 200 likes.*

Filip: *A lot of attention.*

Andrej: *Support even.*

Filip: *And when people come there it's always…*

Andrej: *Like 'oh, cool'.*

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[44] The photograph they discuss in the following dialogue shows members of their subculture next to the wall signature 'HRBI I SRVATI', the hybrid phrasing of 'Serbs and Croats', which will be discussed later in further detail.

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Filip: *Yeah, they have very nice reactions to things like that.*

There is a sense of satisfaction and investment in the way these boys recounted the event, expressing faith in their own agency and the relevance of their political interventions. They emphasize that "one of the guys" on the photo is Serbian because they are aware that such details disrupt the dominant preconceptions around which segregation is organized. Instead of isolating themselves from the community in which they do not quite fit in, these boys constantly claim visibility – and social media expand this possibility.

4.4 Subcultures and Hybridity

There are different levels of reasoning when it comes to principles of youth group formation. The question of who gets to be part of which group, who gets to be widely accepted or widely rejected depends on various locations they occupy in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class and ability. Being 'different' is the most commonly mentioned cause for exclusion among Vukovarian youth: individuals are marked as 'different' or 'weird' if they wear unusual clothing (or clothing that shows low economic standing), have disabilities, fail to embody normative gender and sexuality, or disregard the rules of ethnic segregation. Individuals sometimes show resistance to these norms by emphasizing the point of difference or 'weirdness': the best example is Iva, who plays with non-normative ethnic and sexual identity to challenge her peers' prejudices. She does so by shifting between Croatian and Serbian identity in different contexts: "*When I'm in Serbia, I like to joke that I'm a Croat and such, and here that I'm a Serb. Because it's all the same to me, I don't fit in with either group, and for the better*", or by sometimes declaring that she is bisexual or gay just "*for the reaction*". Iva's hybrid identity provides grounds for exclusion among her peers, but she also uses it as a tool to construct an anti-normative youth identity.

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Sometimes this is achieved through collective identities as well. Filip, Marin and Andrej consider themselves a part of a specific subculture, though they do not have a particular name for it – for practical purposes, I will call them 'the brewers'. The Brewers determine their own identity in an opposition to the majority of their peers, which they refer to as 'normies' – the normal ones. When asked about whether they would characterize themselves as a subculture, one of the boys, Andrej, replied: "*Yeah, in the sense that the majority is about alcohol and turbofolk, and we're more open to all other genres and all that* (laughter). *Everything besides* (more laughter)". Substance use – openness to different "genres" – is a major element in the formation of this subculture ('brewing' is their slang for cannabis consummation) as distinct from most of their peers, but it is not the only activity that differentiates their culture from the dominant culture.

As an ethnically mixed, antinationalist subculture, these three boys represent some of the most marginalized youth members. Their view of authoritative institutions such as schools is highly critical and marked by resistance: two of my interviewees had trouble finishing school and all of them appear to be unable to relate to the majority of their peers and teachers. They recognize the dominant culture as normative and disempowering, which motivates them to build their collective youth identity as way of resistance. This identity is based on the shared activity of brewing, antinationalism, anarchism and various creative practices from music-making to street art. While friendly relations between Serbs and Croats are not entirely uncommon, this group is atypical because it is built upon *deep* friendships between Serbs and Croats and because their creative work often openly problematizes segregation. The example that was mentioned earlier in the context of social media messages is the graffiti 'HRBI I SRVATI ♥'(hybrids between Serbs and Croats – "Herbs and Sroats"), which appeared on the walls of a fence on Milovo brdo[45] (figure 3), and later on the walls of the Economics school

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[45] A hill in the southwestern part of Vukovar.

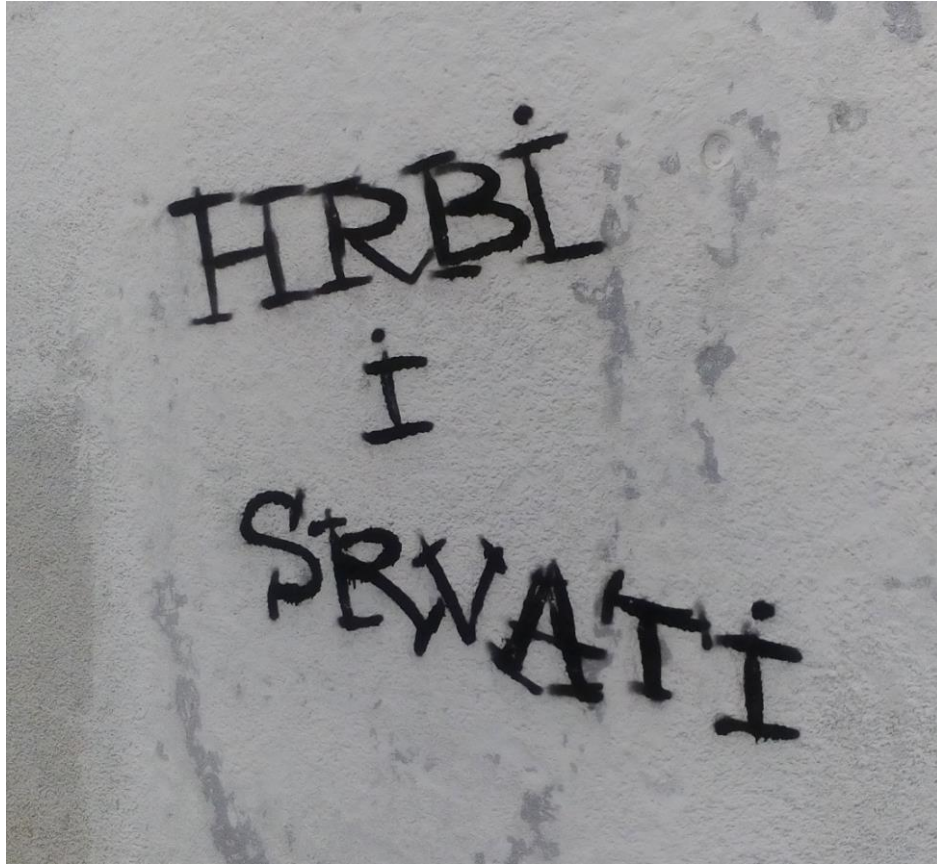(figure   4).

Figure 3 The Signature 'HRBI I SRVATI' on Milovo brdo

Through this very simple intervention into urban space, these boys offer an alternative vision of ethnic relations in the city, putting forward their own experience of community as something that has already brought change within the dominant system of segregation. The two mingled words have more power than it may seem at first glance, even more so because of the wit and ease with which something so 'unimaginable' as hybridity was achieved. Through this artistic intervention – targeted primarily at their peers – the brewers assert a different kind of understanding of 'youth' than the one prevailing in the dominant culture. Instead of being stereotypically 'apathetic and passive', they articulate their youth identity as a tool for setting themselves against the problems they detect in their environment, including nationalism and ethnic divisions. The separation of Croats and Serbs is denaturalized through their artistic interventions which are, given the medium and locations, targeted primarily at their peers – in this sense, they are building a youth-cultural platform for antisegregationist politics.

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Figure 4. Signature on the wall of Economics school (courtesy of Ines)

My conversation with the brewers was in many ways a unique experience: unlike the other interviews, I felt that this was a conversation like any other that this group may have. I was a stranger, but they clearly did not perceive me as someone who could in any way endanger their confidence – they appeared to be presenting themselves exactly as they were, and they were exactly as they wanted to be. It seemed to bring them joy to speak of their own actions and motivations so self-reflexively, relying on a well-balanced interactional dynamic amongst each other. Group interviews tend to unfold more smoothly, but the brewers displayed something that seemed specific to their subculture – the habit of invention. No matter the restrictions they detect in the dominant culture, this group's self-perception is marked by an investment in the pursuit of novelty, freedom and being critical. They find in themselves, in their youth identity, a force through which new discoveries can be made. The Brewers do not believe in revolutions, but they do believe in creating small alliances to pursue non-normative

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ways of life, even if this puts them on the margins: "*You just do the work from backstage. Create your own world. I think that's the only way to change something. I mean, what did revolutions change, like, sort of something but everything stayed the same. I think it's better to create something rather than keep punching the system.*"

I was not surprised when a month after our interview, I received an e-mail from Andrej – who had moved to Norway to work at his father's cow farm – asking me to send him the transcript because he was "*curious*". Who knows what new revelations he was expecting to find in a stranger's, certainly somewhat distorted, representation of his own words. Perhaps it was to satisfy a longing for his friends or even the town he was so critical of. The exclusion that the brewers suffer may be pushing them to migrate, but it also encourages them to cherish their mutual friendships and to construct an empowered vision of their social practices. They may have an idealized perception of their own subversion, often uncritically ascribing it to any element of their lifestyle, but the hybrid character of their subculture is far more than a pose. I am not referring to the mixing of local cultural influences and major colonial cultures such as that of the US (which are now global cultures), since this kind of hybridity is widespread – but to the ethnic hybridity represented by the signature on Milovo brdo. In discussing Andrej as an example of a person who embodies hybridity (through not in so many words), Marin used the perfect metaphor – that of a 'mosaic'.

> Marin: *He loves to listen to everybody and to hear the best of everybody.*
>
> Andrej: *To create a realistic image.*
>
> Marin: *Yeah. Like a mosaic. A bit from everyone.*

The unique 'world' through which the brewers are changing their environment is the world of border-crossing friendships. Similarly to Iva, who embodies ethnic hybridity and non-normative sexuality, the brewers assume an identity which deconstructs hegemonic nationalist

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narratives – a hybrid youth identity as a mosaic which provides a "realistic image" only when it includes "a bit from everyone". Instead of looking back into the past to find ideal models of masculinity or 'pure' ethnic identity, these boys focus on creativity, cultural exchange and experimentation as a way of discovering 'the new' and achieving 'progress'. By inventing themselves, the brewers build a sense of youth culture as a space of re-claimed agency and resistance to norms.

4.5 Will You Say Hi to Me on the Bus?

My last example of youth culture as a response to segregation is the previously mentioned documentary film *Will You Say Hi to Me on the Bus?*[46], which was filmed during a project called *Intercultural Education Through Personal Histories*[47]. The project shows that non-governmental organizations like the *Nansen Dialogue Center*[48] can establish practices which provide a counter-balance to state institutions like schools. Even though it was not conceptualized by youth members, this concept is built around the idea of youth culture as a platform for rethinking ethnic relations in post-conflict communities and advancing reconciliation processes hindered by segregation.

In the film, students begin their endeavor by introducing themselves and the values around which they construct their youth identity – these include reflections on the relevance of their leisure activities and situating themselves in their family (by showing the family trees they have drawn during the workshops). The students' personal narratives demonstrate the role of memory and postmemory in the construction of youth identity: in constructing the 'self' in front of the camera, students refer to the personal narratives of family members and memories of past lives. They continue this process by conducting interviews with family members, asking them share their memories of the prewar and war period, as well as their ideas about

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[46] *Oš Me Pozdravit u Busu?*
[47] *Interkulturalno Obrazovanje Kroz Osobne Povijesti*
[48] *Nansen Dijalog Centar*

contemporary life in Vukovar. These interviews represent a space in which students are able to reflect on their own identifications, and perhaps even bring some relief to those close to them. They are in any case complex and affective post-conflict testimonies, which provide a background for participants to critically examine current segregation and nationalism in Vukovar. It takes effort to allow unofficial postmemories to become counternarratives to the state-making myths which reproduce segregation. As Demaria (2007) pointed out: "What is most difficult is not to tell otherwise or to be recounted by others, but to tell otherwise the founding events of collective identity, mainly national, and to let others tell it: this is the most difficult task." (58).

These postmemories are the means of resistance to the dominant memorial culture, and the means of creating bonds of solidarity between members of the postwar generation: in the final discussion, several students note that 'both sides suffered' cultural trauma, and that this should the basis for mutual support. This part of the film shows the conclusion of the workshop, whereby students are invited to reflect on the transformations in their thinking, emerging concerns and possible solutions for the problems they detect – solutions that are now to be found among their own generation. The title of the film refers to a point in this discussion, when a Croatian boy asks a Serbian girl to start greeting him on the bus.

The discourse of this project is the discourse of 'youth' as a force of social change, investing youth identity with agency that affects the entire community. This understanding disrupts the dominant positioning of youth as passive and disinterested, which I encountered in most interviews with school teachers, and even in some student interviews. The filming of the documentary was thus successful on several levels: it gathered Croatian and Serbian youth in a collaborative educational context, emphasized the political role of youth, and provided a different perspective on cultural trauma and collective memory. The memories of war and prewar Vukovar offered by mothers, grandmothers, aunts, fathers and stepfathers in this

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documentary are not memories of wartime heroism and militarized masculinity – they include quotidian details and a wide range of emotions relived by different generations, ethnic groups and genders. The reparative possibilities of these unofficial, non-hegemonic memories is not simply in their potential to make ties between identities, but in the challenge that they pose to the patriarchal hierarchy imposed through official memories – it is not just the future of ethnic relations which is at stake here, but the quality of life for all social groups in the city.

I have used this example to show that 'youth' is a powerful category which can be used as a tool for questioning and resisting dominant culture in educational contexts. It differs from neotribal negotiations and subcultural resistance because it does not imply a strong hierarchy between age groups. The film is a result of cooperation between young and adult members of the community, nurturing intergenerational exchange that goes both ways. It differs from state education because it questions, rather than reinforces state ideology and its generational, gender and ethnic hierarchies. It should be, to my mind, a reference point for future community building, as well as a source of hope in the transformative potential youth culture and postmemory.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

I entered this research seeking to understand the structural conditions that have framed my generation as 'the generation of postmemory' (Hirsch 2012) – the postwar, post-socialist youth which is expected to make sense of the war in Croatia as the founding event of the new, independent state through stories of heroism and sacrifice. These constitutive myths of the nation are offered to us as the 'true' substance of our identities – our history, our culture, our moral values (concealing the corruptive processes which have introduced great uncertainty into the very concept of the 'postwar generation'). I have outlined the militaristic, patriarchal and nationalist foundations of official memories which occupy such a prominent place in the culture of Vukovar – the 'monument city'[49] of Croatia. These hegemonic memories are reproduced through state education, affirming the cultural and institutional segregation of Croats and Serbs in the city, and therefore enabling the continuation of discrimination and exclusion along the lines of ethnicity, age and gender.

I have outlined two dominant discourses of justification – the naturalization of ethnic difference and the sense of transgenerational responsibility – in order to define segregation as a normative process of producing fixed, separated identities through collective memories of war trauma and commemorative spectacle. Using an intersectional lens, I examined the normative effects of this process on the formation of youth identities, while maintaining that the category of 'youth' can open spaces for negotiating with, and resisting, the dominant memorial culture. I referred to these spaces as youth culture and detected their emergence in youth practices which include coffee rituals, social networking, subcultural and neotribal alliances and participation in civil society projects. The subversive potential of youth culture, established through non-hegemonic postmemory, antinormativity and hybridity, enables the positioning of youth as an oppositional force in relation to hegemonic institutional practices.

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[49] Dežulović (2014).

This argument invites further discussions about the effects of intergenerational dynamics on post-conflict societies. There are still questions to be answered regarding the role of state education in constructing collective identities, as well as in fighting exclusions and building egalitarian communities. Much more is to be said about the relationship between youth-cultural spaces and civil society – perhaps the future of reconciliation and social change is highly dependent on it? What concepts besides hybridity could help us rethink identity? These are only some of the possible directions which need to be taken in order to understand the broader issues of conflict and post-conflict conditions.

I invested a lot of hope into this research, often wondering whether it is nothing more than wishful thinking. As a member of the postwar generation, I was taught to be cynical in regarding the social conditions that surround me – but cynicism comes from fear, and I recognize this fear among other members of my generation. What good did it do us? I decided to find hope in the little things – in the fact that the Economics school will soon have a new building, with proper classrooms for both programs, in the different dialects I hear as I walk through the halls of the city theatre… There are reasons to be hopeful, and besides, what kind of a research ends with hopelessness? We ask, listen, and write because we believe in social change, and then we find that we are witnessing it.

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