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Department of Semiotics, Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, University of Tartu, Estonia

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I must admit, this section proved challenging to write. Upon wondering why this is so, I realized that writing it marks the end of a chapter that has been quite a ride; unpredictable, challenging, frustrating, inspiring, motivating, and creative (yes, I could go on). More importantly, I wondered how words could even express my gratitude to the people who have supported me along the way, each in their own way.

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PUBLICATION DATA

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Damčević, Katarina; Rodik, Filip. 2018. Ready for the Homeland: Hate Speech on Croatian Right-Wing Facebook Pages. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 20(3): 31–52.

Article II
Damčević, Katarina. 2021. Cultural texts, enemies and taboos: Autocommunicative meaning-making surrounding the "Ready for the Homeland" Ustaša salute in Croatia. *Social Semiotics,* doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1883404, 1–27.

Article III
Damčević, Katarina. "Ready for the Homeland" in Croatian media: Commemorations, victory, and foundation. *Sign Systems Studies*, forthcoming.

The contribution of the author in jointly written papers:

Article I: I was directly involved in the writing of the paper and its development. Filip and I discussed our contributions, based on which he focused on data gathering, creating a base of Facebook posts for analysis, and elaborating his part of the process. I established the theoretical framework and conducted the semiotic analysis of the gathered data. I was also responsible for the editing of the article following our reviewers' comments and for proofreading the article once it had been approved by the editor.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the presence of hate speech and contested symbols has been documented worldwide. While it is certainly challenging to measure this presence with specificity, there are periods in societies where it becomes more prominent. Some of those periods include global crises – such as the Covid-19 pandemic – as well as wars, such as the one that started with Russia invading Ukraine in February 2022. Political turmoil, the proliferation of radical right parties and organizations, and post-conflict memory politics can also present favorable conditions for the reinforcement of social polarization, and a lack of political dialogue. My dissertation predominantly focuses on the aforementioned dimension of hate speech and contested symbols; namely, their (mis)uses by various social and political actors in a post-conflict context, with the aim of advancing political agendas, facilitating a one-sided interpretation of the past, and reifying national identity.

When I started my doctoral studies in late 2017, the fascist salute "Ready for the Homeland" (*Za dom spremni* – elaborated in more detail in later sections and hereinafter: ZDS) had already been part of controversies associated with legacies of war, remembrance practices, and the rise of nationalism and radical-right parties and movements in Croatia. One case in particular caught my attention and subsequently partly determined the direction of my research. After winning a qualification match against Iceland in 2013, Josip Šimunić, a Croat from Australia who played for the Croatian national team, celebrated the victory by chanting the ZDS salute in front of an audience of thousands, encouraging them to chant in response. His act triggered a backlash from the local and international community and ultimately resulted in a fine for Šimunić and a ban by FIFA from subsequent ten matches (see Brentin 2016). Perhaps more importantly, the controversy motivated debates about football and political extremism and their relation to remembrance practices and legacies of the 1990s Croatian War of Independence, during which sport was a crucial part of nation-building (see Brentin 2013).

As I demonstrate in my dissertation, ZDS has become a prominent element for reifying post-war national identity and tailoring political agendas, while also demonstrating the capacity for affecting relations with neighboring countries such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The potential of ZDS to trigger memory wars has been an intriguing dynamic to explore and remains highly relevant for Croatia's political and social reality when it comes to dealing with traumatic and contested legacies of World War Two and the 1990s *Homeland War*.[1]

My dissertation consists of three articles and a framing chapter. I begin the framing chapter by introducing the specific research object and research

[1] The dominant narrative about the war predominantly refers to it as the *Homeland War* (Domovinski rat), a term that suffers from ideological saturation. Accordingly, I have used italics whenever referring to it in my dissertation.

problem that focuses on the meaning-making surrounding nationalistically motivated hate speech and contested symbols in Croatia and the communicative functions of that multilayered practice. I point out the relevance and implications of the topic, as well as the importance of investigating the prevalent modes of meaning-making associated with hate speech practices. In so doing, I consider the hate speech syntagm more closely by limiting myself to scholarly contributions that have been relevant for my research. Then, by presenting my main research questions and aims, I briefly outline the purposes of this study and provide an insight into what those questions help illustrate in relation to my research object.

In the following section I contextualize my research object – the Ustaša ZDS salute – within two main historical periods relevant for comprehending its background and the ways it has been used by different actors. Specifically, I provide a brief overview of the World War Two (hereinafter: WWII) fascist puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), as well as its legacy and implications. I further provide a concise overview of the 1990s Croatian War of Independence (*Homeland War* or Domovinski rat in Croatian) and the narrative established to preserve its values, the role of the salute, and the relevant actors associated with it.

The section titled *Language and Nationalism* considers the intertwinement of language and politics during the Homeland War and the ways language was used to reinforce nationalism and polarization. The ZDS salute resurfaced during the 1990s, mainly as a result of being popularized by right-wing politics while its use and legitimacy during and after the conflict remain contested to date. I further outline some of the main characteristics of wartime media in Croatia and the role it had in producing the *Other,* i.e., the perceived enemy, and facilitating antagonistic and divisive rhetoric. I then continue by providing information about hate speech laws and regulations in Croatia more generally and related to the ZDS salute and the Ustaša legacy specifically. And lastly, I conclude this section with a brief overview of existing research related to hate speech and contested symbols that is pertinent to my research object.

I further present an overview of analyzed sources, followed by brief summaries of my articles and the main ideas therein. Lastly, the conclusion and future directions of the study are considered.

1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The thematic focus of the articles included in this thesis revolves around analyzing the meaning-making patterns surrounding nationalistically motivated hate speech and contested symbols in Croatia, as well as their communicative functions. In doing so, I focus on the case of the WWII ZDS Ustaša salute in different communicative situations and semiotic environments. Prior to discussing the research problem in more detail, I provide brief contextual background of the salute and the Ustaša regime.

The fascist Ustaša movement functioned as a terrorist organization before WWII. In the aftermath of the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941, the Ustaše ruled the Independent State of Croatia (hereinafter: NDH), a puppet state of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy that existed from 1941 to 1945 (to be addressed in more detail in the third chapter). ZDS was the official salute of the NDH that the Ustaša regime used in documents and declarations that sent thousands of innocent civilians to their deaths (see Mataušić 2003).

The salute was banned in socialist Yugoslavia, but it resurfaced during the 1990s *Homeland War* when it was popularized through right-wing politics (I address this in more detail in article II and in the section about laws and regulations). Since the 1990s war, the salute was appropriated as a symbol of the *Homeland War* by right-wing politicians and groups, and it continues to be considered as hate speech advocating radical right positions by many in Croatia and neighboring countries. To date, neither the salute nor insignia related to the Ustaša regime are explicitly banned in Croatia[2], although public display can result in fines for disturbing the peace.[3]

My dissertation investigates the meaning-making processes surrounding ZDS by specifically focusing on its presence in social media, its presence at memorial sites and national commemorations, and in media discourse. In the context of this work, meaning-making is understood as a process through which individuals, groups, and communities comprehend and interpret actions, events, and the world they are a part of. Accordingly, and following the lines of Stuart Hall (2000: 17), I consider identities as constructed in different socio-cultural interactions and constituted through opposing the *other.* That said, I rely on the

[2] Technically and based on the Article 325. of the Croatian Penal Code, a person can be charged for inciting hatred and/or offending people based on their national or ethnic belonging when using the salute.

[3] However, Austria banned two Croatian Ustaša symbols in 2019: the letter "U" with a grenade, and the checkerboard coat of arms with the white field first under a stylized letter U, which was used in the NDH's flag. The fines for violating the ban are up to 4,000 euros or 10,000 euros for repeat offenders. The decision was made due to the common use of Ustaša symbols at the annual Croatian right-wing gathering in Bleiburg in Austria, an event that commemorates the deaths of Nazi-allied Croatian troops and civilians. "Austria Bans Two Croatian Ustaša Symbols", online: https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/13/austria-bans-two-croatian-ustasa-symbols/. See also Pavlaković, Brentin, and Pauković 2018, "The Controversial Commemoration: Transnational Approaches to Remembering Bleiburg".

assumption that processes of identification have a discursive and context-specific nature and that they are characterized by an ongoing negotiation of meanings.

1.1. Defining hate speech

The "hate speech" syntagm remains challenging to define; in addition to being a descriptive concept, it is simultaneously an evaluative term since it judges its referent negatively. While I focus on meaning-making patterns and functions of hate speech rather than its definitions, scholarly contributions from various disciplines provide insights into what should be considered hate speech and/or how to approach it. In the context of my study, in Croatia and neighboring countries the use of ZDS continues to be interpreted as hate speech advocating radical right positions. Accordingly, here I limit myself to scholarly contributions that guided my research process and approach.

Judith Butler argues it is not *speech* or words in hate speech that are problematic; the issue is the *way* something is uttered, which can become damaging given that particular context (Butler 1997: 2). This brings the relevance of context to the forefront, a dimension central for the current study, which is demonstrated in my article "Cultural texts, enemies, and taboos: autocommunicative meaning-making surrounding the 'Ready for the Homeland' Ustaša salute in Croatia" (Damčević 2021). Namely, the implications of *where* something is uttered or placed adds to how it is interpreted, especially in trauma-laden societies such as Croatia where certain locations carry the burden of wartime tragedy and loss.

Katharine Gelber points out specific issues that accompany the "hate speech" syntagm, the first of them being the use of the term "hate". According to Gelber, this implies "that the presence of an emotion of hate is the primary or determinative component in understanding speech that is capable of causing sufficient harm to warrant regulation" (Gelber 2019: 4). Secondly, Gelber argues that the term leads to a questionable assumption according to which hate speech can be identified by focusing on vituperative speech, epithets, or profanities, which is an oversimplification since hate speech does not need to be egregious in order to be considered as such (Gelber 2019; see also Langton 2012). That hate speech does not need to be explicit or extreme to be harmful is a crucial aspect that can facilitate a more holistic and nuanced understanding of this complex communicative practice. An example that demonstrates this aptly is a nationalist T-shirt and online store in Croatia that attempted to celebrate the WWII Ustaša movement while trying to avoid potential legal consequences for using controversial symbols. To accomplish this, they created a T-shirt with a stylized letter U that stands for "Ustaša" and incorporated it into a smiley-face emoticon, ultimately naming the product "Uncle Smiley". The ZDS salute,

however, was disguised by omitting the word "home" and replacing it with a picture of a house.[4]

I had the opportunity to explore various intricacies of hate speech as part of my fellowship in the Dangerous Speech Project[5], the US based initiative that studies various forms of speech that may inspire violence between groups of people. Along the lines of Katharine Gelber, the director of the project, Susan Benesch, argues that the term "hate speech" already poses an issue since it does not account for what is actually meant by "hate". Namely, Benesch asks if there exists a threshold that should be exceeded for an emotional response to count. Another question is whether the "hate" in "hate speech" "means that the speaker hates, or seeks to persuade others to hate, or wants to make people *feel* hatred?" (Dangerous Speech Project 2021). In order to provide a clearer conceptual and practical dimension of the term "hate speech", as well as to distinguish it from speech that may breed ground for future violence between groups, Benesch proposes the Dangerous Speech Model that focuses on the message itself and its four related elements: speaker, audience, context, and medium (see, e.g., Maynard and Benesch 2016; Dangerous Speech Project 2021).

When it comes to considering different ways in which hate speech can be harmful, Jeremy Waldron (2012) argues that hate speech – especially in its propagandistic form – gradually leaves a mark in the overall social fabric and undermines the assurance of dignity among (more) vulnerable/non-dominant groups and communities. As Waldron writes, "[…] that's the point of hate speech – to send these messages, to make these messages part of the permanent visible fabric of society so that, for the father walking with his children […] there will be no knowing when they will be confronted by one of these signs […]" (2012: 3). The silencing mechanism of hate speech can present a consistent obstacle in these cases, especially if – and when – government bodies fail to provide a sense of security and belonging to targeted groups (see Fladmoe, Nadim 2017).

In her article "Toxic Speech: Inoculations and Antidotes", Lynne Tirrell considers a fruitful dialogue between epidemiology and philosophy of language, similarly focusing on the various features and patterns of hate speech rather than its definitions (2018; see also Tirrel 2017). Tirrell emphasizes that toxic speech – as any toxin – inflicts harm, threatens the well-being of those who are targeted by it, and damages the social fabric (2018: 118). She goes on to write that toxic speech – which is not necessarily limited to hate speech – gains power as its frequency increases, as well as with publicity and the support of public officials (2018: 118–119). I have addressed this more closely in article II where I delve into the attitudes towards ZDS expressed by various actors, such as politicians and war veterans, which were characterized by a high degree of

[4] "Balkan Nationalists Use T-Shirts as Political Fashion Statement", online: https://balkaninsight.com/2018/09/13/balkan-nationalists-use-t-shirts-as-political-fashion-statement-09-12-2018/.

[5] https://dangerousspeech.org/.

relativization and often support. This, in turn, may contribute to the further normalization of the use, presence, and frequency of hate speech in public. As Tirrell notes, some of the main aspects that the so-called discursive epidemiologist looks at are the size and distribution of extremist populations; namely, are they isolated or spread, do they influence social state and national policies and in what ways (2018: 141). Rather than observing solely individual agents or groups that spread toxic speech, a more holistic approach is needed in order to account for various patterns and features that accompany it. This is in line with the semiotic approach I relied on in my dissertation, by investigating meaning-making patterns that accompanied different instances of ZDS use, as well as the interpretive frames it was a part of, and the wider socio-communicative functions it triggered.

Rather than defining hate speech, it is more productive to focus on the main functional patterns that are consistent regardless of definitions that may be employed. Hate speech does indeed have specific functions and it can be defined as having the goal of dehumanizing[6] and/or degrading a person or a group, specifically members belonging to a certain community (e.g., based on race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, disability, and others) (Gagliardone et al. 2015; Dangerous Speech Project 2021). Another aspect that inevitably influences the establishment of a univocal definition of hate speech is the intertwinement of cultural norms, traditions, values, and beliefs that bring forth their own peculiarities. Moreover, contexts in which hate speech may carry a heavier symbolic burden include post-conflict societies where polarizing and divisive rhetoric and symbols played a significant role during large-scale conflicts and wars, such as during the 1990s Yugoslav Wars and the Croatian *Homeland War* specifically (1991–1995) (see, for instance Thompson 1999; Kurspahić 2003; Kolstø 2009).

1.2. The dual nature of the *Za dom spremni* salute

When an example of hate speech also functions as a contested symbol – such as ZDS does – the post-conflict setting becomes that more complex due to a variety of actors attempting to attach their preferred meanings to it. Authors have pointed out that symbols – particularly divisive ones – can be crucial when analyzing conflicts within post-violence or reconciliation settings (Moeschberger, DeZalia 2014). The interpretation of symbols depends on the contexts in which they appear, and as highlighted by Mach, "the same object can symbolize two quite different ideas and emotions, and the particular meaning depends on the context within which the symbol is used" (1993: 25). This concept is at the crux of the ZDS issue. As demonstrated in my articles – specifically articles II

[6] Dehumanization – namely referring to people as less than human – can make violence seem acceptable or even necessary. For a more recent thorough contribution on the various facets of dehumanization, see David Smith's book *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization* (2021).

and III – while objects can indeed acquire additional meanings in time, this does not mean that the original meaning somehow becomes obsolete. When it comes to ZDS, precisely the latter has usually been the go-to argument of politicians, radical-right organizations and parties, and war veterans' associations. Specifically, the claim that ZDS has come to symbolize the Croatian army's victory and defense during the 1990s *Homeland War* and that it has little or nothing to do with the WWII Ustaša regime. The issue, of course, is far from being that simple or black and white, as I demonstrate in the following sections of my frame and the articles included in my thesis.

Following a semiotic perspective, and specifically Juri Lotman's contributions, symbols transmit texts, plotlines, and other semiotic formations from one cultural layer to another, while also serving the function of unifying a culture (Lotman 1990: 102–119). Symbols have an invariant nature as they appear in different cultural layers, and further, a symbol may transform when it correlates with new cultural contexts (ibid.). The most important function of symbols in the context of this dissertation is the mechanism of cultural memory, where symbols appear as a "semiotic condenser" that plays the role of a mediator between different spheres of signification (Lotman 1990: 111; see also Damčević 2021). The ZDS salute – which functions both as hate speech and a divisive symbol – therefore invokes "past injuries and traumas that are historically sedimented in the norms, structures, and conventions of language and social institutions" (Posselt 2017: 17).

ZDS has been one of the central elements for reifying Croatian national identity, advancing political agendas through mobilizing the legacies of WWII and the 1990s *Homeland War*, and advancing a one-sided view of the past (see Pavlaković, Pauković 2019). The rise of historical revisionism, radical-right tendencies, and with it the presence of the salute in various communicative contexts, became more prominent after Croatia became a European Union member in 2013. Namely, due to extensive monitoring and documenting of human rights issues during Croatia's EU accession, the period following 2013 witnessed a notable rise of hate speech and nationalistic and revisionist tendencies; once there was no more monitoring and Croatia was in the EU, there was no incentive to ban or conceal ZDS since there were no longer consequences. Political scientist Dejan Jović further elaborates the aforementioned rise by explaining that the authoritarian ethno-nationalists consider they have more liberty because of Croatia's EU membership and see it as a crucial step towards the realization of a concrete, factual sovereign state, and not solely a nominal one (2017: 29). Another reason, according to Vjeran Pavlaković, is that the political elites attempted to mobilize voters "through the debates over fragmented and clashing narratives of twentieth-century traumas once the strategic goal of Euro-Atlantic integration was completed" (2019: 119).

The ECRI (*European Commission against Racism and Intolerance*) report that was published in May 2018 and focused on Croatia, noted "a growing rise of nationalism, particularly among the youth, which primarily takes the form of praising the fascist Ustaša regime" (ECRI 2018: 9). It is sufficient to point out

that during one of the controversies that included the use of the salute – which I focus on in article II – the crisis of meanings that ZDS triggered briefly threatened to topple the government (Damčević 2021; see also Cvijanović 2018).[7]

The above-mentioned tendencies indicate the necessity and increasing relevance of studying the meaning-making surrounding hate speech and contested symbols. As the current work shows, WWII symbols and the legacy of the *Homeland War* continue to play a key role in Croatian society and politics, primarily as a tool for reifying and negotiating Croatia's post-war identity. This is often particularly prominent in societies where a lack of open debate hindered an earlier adequate dealing with the past, such as in post-socialist contexts (see Pavlaković and Pauković 2019; also, Tamm 2013). Lastly, the discourses associated with ZDS are not exclusively about the salute but also about the qualitative evaluation of implications and signification tendencies that the salute triggers and quantifies.

[7] "Croatia's Fascist Slogan Threatens to Topple the Government", online: https://balkaninsight.com/2017/08/31/croatia-fascist-slogan-threatens-to-topple-govt-08-30-2017/.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS

In this section I establish the main aims and purposes of my research, elaborate my research questions, and outline the aspects they help me answer. I do not introduce the main concepts I rely on in detail since they are included in the corresponding publications included in this dissertation. However, I do provide a brief overview where needed, mainly to introduce my aims and research questions.

As emphasized earlier, my dissertation is built upon the assumption that identities gain meaning through the relation with the *Other* (Hall 2000), namely through difference. Identity in this sense is not fixed but rather dynamic and constantly re-defined through meaning-making processes. This makes the metalanguage of cultural semiotics a fruitful approach since it accounts for the dynamic and relational nature of identification processes (Madisson 2016; see also Lorusso 2015; Makarychev, Yatsyk 2017). The semiosphere – and semiospheric analysis specifically – illustrates this dynamism and relationality since it emphasizes that semiotic unities do not function in isolation but are a part of wider semiotic wholes that are in continuous dialogue. This enables the analysis of different semiospheres as separate wholes, as well as their relations with other semiotic unities within a wider cultural context (Torop 2003: 335–336; see also Torop 2005).

The overarching aim of my thesis is to analyze the meaning-making surrounding the case of nationalistically motivated hate speech and contested symbol – the ZDS salute. The first specific aim is to identify the meaning-making tendencies surrounding the salute and the consequent interactions that take place between the actors supporting or contesting it – namely war veterans and politicians – and how this dynamic influences a more general attempt of coming to terms with the past and the WWII Ustaša legacy more specifically. I address this in article II where I propose a framework that helps understand the semiotic mechanisms upon which hate speech practices are built and reinforced, as well as the signification tendencies that characterize them. I show how certain dominant meaning-making elements (such as the tendency towards normative texts, the presence of antithetical modeling, and taboo signifiers) direct towards – and reinforce – a hermetic meaning-making sphere and hinder dialogue. The article also further develops the use of Lotman's concept of autocommunication to advance the understanding of the semiotic logic of hate speech and contested symbols. I utilize the concept of text that was particularly relevant for my research focus and demonstrate what texts are triggered by ZDS following its inclusion on a *Homeland War* memorial plaque. In addition to fulfilling a regulatory function by proscribing rules or guidelines – such as in the case of the Homeland War Declaration (2000) and Dialogue Document (2018) – texts can maintain symbolic divisions between groups, which may in turn limit the space for acknowledging and welcoming alternatives.

Article I focuses on selected Croatian right-wing Facebook pages and explores how inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory textual elements come to form a coherent identity discourse. For this purpose, the semiospheric approach allowed the option of mapping core values and identifying the communicative functions of the salute in the frames of the selected Facebook pages and gathered data. Accordingly, in this article I identify what kind of speech arose in association with the ZDS salute on the selected Facebook pages and how frequently it occurred within the determined time frame (2012 – 2017). Secondly, I determine and outline the socio-communicative functions of ZDS on the selected pages.

The advantages of cultural semiotics for analyzing hate speech practices also lies in its capacity to identify and analyze wider socio-communicative functions of texts and signification tendencies. This is an aspect I open more in article III that analyzes the media discourse surrounding ZDS in the aftermath of two national commemorations that took place in spring 2020. The cases reveal the underlying *discourse of victory and foundation* that underpins Croatia's post-independence national identity, which is claimed by various actors. Relying predominantly on Juri Lotman's concept of self-description (2005; 2009), I show how the *discourse of victory and foundation* serves to maintain the boundary between *us* and *them* and consequently regulate the meaning-making sphere surrounding Croatia's *Homeland War* legacy. The main research questions I focus on explore: a) the salient discursive strategies and strategies of (de)legitimization surrounding ZDS, and b) the dominant discourses(s) upon which the national self-description has been built.

The second aim is to explore how the framework of cultural semiotics helps analyze the semiotic dynamic of hate speech and contested symbols to further advance the understanding of that multifaceted phenomena. In this regard it is worth mentioning that cultural semiotics does not attempt to approach reality in its entirety nor diversity but explores sign-based models that are usually simplifying (M. Lotman 2001: 216–217). As such, I rely on cultural semiotics since it helps me explore interpretative frames and dominant meaning-making hierarchies associated with the salute.

In addition to shedding light on specific semiotic mechanisms that underpin and facilitate the reinforcement of hate speech practices, the third aim of my thesis is to bring Lotmanian semiotics closer to the Croatian scholarly context and demonstrate the applicability of the approach to the topic under question. While Lotman's scholarly contribution is certainly not unfamiliar in Croatia's academic community (see, for example, Solar 1995, 2005; Brnčić 1998; Užarević 1990; Veršić 2004; 2012), it has yet to be applied more thoroughly to the analysis of memory culture, digital culture, politics, nation-building practices, and post-conflict identity creation, among other areas and topics.

By relying on cultural semiotics, I approach the ZDS salute and its manifestations as a particular model or interpretational frame of social reality. Accordingly, I observe the phenomenon of ZDS – and its status as an instance of hate speech and a contested symbol – as a specific organization of information.

As pointed out in the *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures*, cultural semiotics explores the functional correlation of different sign systems (Ivanov et al. 1998: 33), with the overarching goal of explaining the ways in which different sign systems model reality. At the heart of my approach is the motivation to explore and comprehend meaning-making practices surrounding the ZDS salute. In this sense, the relevance and value of relying on the toolkit of cultural semiotics lies in opening and analyzing dominant meaning-making hierarchies that the salute is a part of.

Lotman's eclecticism and continuously evolving thought has been further enriched through contemporary possibilities of networking and scholarly collaboration. Moreover, generations of students have been graduating from the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu, all of them bringing new perspectives and insights into Lotman's work. I, for one, would be curious to find out what he would have to say regarding this dynamic and what his view on many of the ideas inspired by his work would be. This, however, remains only in the sphere of speculation, though one of his thoughts may help shed light on his scholarly disposition:

> What in fact is this enormous amount of people who now live on this planet and will maybe live here also in the future? Is it a conglomeration of individuals who live only in order to take over from each other territory and the right to live? Or is this conglomeration of individuals one method of description and each individual by himself or herself another method of description? Thus no method of description rules out another method of description. It is as if in their reciprocal tension they create a third viewpoint (Lotman, in Torop 2000: 14–15).

3. CROATIA – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

In this chapter I provide a concise overview of the historical and political background relevant for the ZDS salute in the context of this dissertation. In so doing, I provide an insight into the WWII Nazi-aligned Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*) and the role of ZDS therein, followed by a section on the revival of ZDS during the *Homeland War*. I further discuss the established war narrative and the implications it carries for the war legacy in contemporary Croatia.

The ZDS salute and its position in contemporary Croatia finds itself between two historical points of reference: WWII and the *Homeland War*. My discussions with friends and colleagues from Croatia often end up featuring the phrase *stuck in the past.* While this is undoubtedly the case, Croatia is not the only country struggling with historical traumas and controversial legacies. Some states that face similar challenges include Austria (Uhl 2006), Estonia (Tamm 2008; 2013), and Slovenia (Luthar 2013), so what makes Croatia different? In *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth Century Traumas in Croatia,* Vjeran Pavlaković questions Croatia's "obsession with the past" and the considerable level of political fragmentation associated with it. He goes on to write that, while the presence of ideological and ethnic divisions that ultimately led to substantial levels of violence in the twentieth century cannot be denied, it is barely a novelty in that period's history (2019: 121–122).

However, Yugoslavia's violent dissolution – fueled by contemporary crises as well as traumas stemming from WWII – made it that more challenging to constructively deal with the past through efforts conducive to dialogue and regional reconciliation.[8] Namely, rather than fostering unity and developing policies aimed at younger generations, Croatian political and social actors recognized more benefits in retaining and maintaining power by relying on symbolic politics (see Pavlaković, Pauković 2019; I also focus on this dimension in more detail in article II). Elizabeth Jelin defines such political elites as memory entrepreneurs, namely "those who seek social recognition, and political legitimacy of one (usually their own) interpretation or narrative of the past, engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible

[8] There are also different implications related to memorialization practices and reconciliation. A recent and thorough study is Lea David's book *The Past Can't Heal Us. The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights* (2020). David questions different ways that made the idea of the "right" memorialization imperative. She points out some of the effects of the institutionalization of the so-called "coming to terms with the past" agenda, primarily on vulnerable communities. Some of those effects are the blurring of boundaries between *national* and *individual,* which in turn strengthens categories of nation and ethnicity. Another effect can be the rise of competitive victimhood, which leads to the creation of hierarchies that consequently further reproduce inequality.

social and political attention on their enterprise" (2003: 33–4). As Pavlaković points out, memory entrepreneurs dominate political systems in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which in turn encourages the Croatian elites to maintain the status quo by advancing policies and agendas that are based on their interpretations of past conflicts (2019: 122). The four-year research project FRAMNAT[9] (2014–2018) aptly reveals this dynamic by analyzing the most significant national commemorations in Croatia that displayed a trend "emphasizing nationalist rhetoric, plotting enemies, revenge for past crimes, and one-sided victimhood" (Pavlaković 2019: 122).

Croatia became the twenty-eighth member of the European Union on 1 July 2013, an achievement that was a part of a long-term strategic goal. However, the consistent presence of unresolved traumatic issues tied to the twentieth century continued to burden Croatian society and negatively influence relations with neighboring countries. Namely, Croatia's accession to the EU was delayed for years precisely due to a reluctance to deal with the recent past and the problematic relations with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (see also Pavlaković 2008, 2010; Clark 2009; Koren 2011; Ljubojević 2019).

EU membership was accompanied by promises of a more prosperous future. Having become a member of the EU as a union founded upon the victory of the antifascist coalition in WWII, the expectations that Croatia was expected to fulfill included the protection of human rights, minority rights, tolerance towards difference, and the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust in a dignified manner (Pavlaković 2019: 119). This ended up being a rather optimistic outlook since polemics over the past resurfaced quickly.

After Croatia became a member of the EU, the seemingly stable consensus on antifascism and its legacy started losing ground. This became especially prominent after the dominant center-right party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ – *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*), shifted to the right under the short-lived leadership of Tomislav Karamarko. HDZ was involved in various corruption scandals, which also meant that focusing on the past enabled the party to rely on patriotism and mobilize the 1990s war legacy. When Karamarko was forced out of the HDZ leadership in 2016, Andrej Plenković became his successor. Plenković, who spent much of his career in Brussels as part of the Croatian foreign affairs delegation, often allowed historical controversies to accumulate rather than taking a strong stance and intervening into the complex dynamics of memory politics. As prime minister, Plenković has worked to shape a more classic Christian Democratic party out of the broad nation-building coalition of the 1990s, which had incorporated many radical right wing political options during the war years.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović – who also comes from the HDZ – served as president from 2015 until 2020. She considered the ZDS salute a "historical phrase" and relativized and downplayed its presence and use. While she did

[9] More information on the project's official website: http://framnat.eu/?lang=en

occasionally condemn the Ustaša regime and the NDH – usually during international visits and when pressured by external actors to act more decisively towards the rise of historical revisionism in Croatia – she had a noticeably more ambiguous relationship with the Ustaša past in the domestic context.[10]

Early 2020 was marked by a change in political leadership after the center-left former prime minister Zoran Milanović became Croatia's fifth president. His inauguration and subsequent political engagement were marked by a significantly more adamant stance towards ZDS and the Ustaša legacy when he openly criticized the salute's presence, triggering political scandals that revolved around the WWII and the *Homeland War* legacies.

3.1. The Ustaše and the Independent State of Croatia

> Knife, revolver, machine gun and time bomb, these are the harbinger bells of the dawn and the RESURRECTION OF THE INDEPENDENT CROATIAN STATE.
>
> Ante Pavelić[11]

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview about the wider context surrounding the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945). While it is not possible to account for all the dimensions of this complex topic, my aim is to provide relevant background along with some fundamental sources for interested readers, as well as to paint a clearer picture of the context in which ZDS was used.

As pointed out by Goran Miljan, neither the establishment nor the aims of NDH can be understood without taking into account "the context of its formation, organizational and ideological structure as well as the influences its members were exposed to during their formative period" (2016: 4). Specifically, multiple right-wing movements existed in interwar Yugoslavia and advocated for rival pan-Yugoslav, Greater Croatian, or Greater Serbian national projects. However, only the Ustaša movement acquired clear fascist characteristics (Iordachi 2014: 383; see also Goldstein 2006; Bartulin 2008). The context that preceded the formation of NDH is necessary to understand prior to focusing on the state itself.

[10] "Fascist Legacy Causes Persistent Headache for Croatian President", online: https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/28/fascist-legacy-causes-persistent-headache-for-croatian-president/.

[11] Ante Pavelić, "Ropstvo je dodijalo", *Ustaša, Vjesnik hrvatskih revolucionaraca* (February 1932), 1.

Already the period after the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes[12] presented itself with various challenges. Most of them were reflected in the efforts of groups and political parties who called for a dissolution or complete restructuring; this specifically included a majority of Croatian politicians, as well as some Slovenian ones, who argued for the devolution of power and federalization, while Serbian politicians argued for centralization (Miljan 2016: 5). With the ongoing tensions and political divisions rising, these circumstances culminated in violent parliamentary conflict in June 1928, during which Puniša Račić – a member of the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*) – shot and killed several members of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*), consequently wounding its leader Stjepan Radić, who died on 8 August 1928 (Miljan 2016; see also Goldstein 2003). Radić's funeral soon turned into a Croatian political demonstration against the Belgrade regime, and as the demonstrations continued, King Alexander proclaimed dictatorship on 6 January 1929 (see Goldstein 2003). In addition to enforcing administrative changes and dividing the country into provinces, the King abolished the freedom of press as well as political parties with national, religious, or regional features, while the name of the country was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Miljan 2016: 5).

One Croatian nationalist who believed that politics in Yugoslavia would never be the same after Radić's assassination was Ante Pavelić, a lawyer and parliamentary deputy of the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP – *Hrvatska stranka prava*). After King Alexander declared a royal dictatorship, Pavelić fled to Mussolini's Italy. While in exile, Pavelić founded an underground terrorist organization called the *Ustaša* (plural Ustaše, from the Croatian word for insurgent) the goal of which was to achieve Croatia's independence from Yugoslavia. Pavelić modeled his *Ustaš*a movement on Italian Fascism and added antisemitism to the *Ustaša* platform after Hitler rose to power in 1933. With the aim of instigating political crises in Yugoslavia, the Ustaše waged a bombing campaign, staged a failed uprising in northern Dalmatia, and eventually participated in the assassination of the King in 1934.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia had attempted to stay neutral as Europe slid into another disastrous war, especially since it was internally weakened due to the unresolved nationalities question and the rise of radicalized political movements on both the right and the left. This balancing act was ultimately unsustainable, and Axis forces invaded and occupied the country after a brief war. Pavelić and his followers were brought out of exile to take over the newly founded Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which included most of contemporary Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but notably lacked most of the

[12] The Kingdom was formed on 1 December 1918 and ruled by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty. It was comprised of Dalmatia, Croatia-Slavonia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vojvodina, all of them areas formerly subject to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Kingdom also included the previously independent kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Macedonia and Kosovo, territories taken by Serbia in the Balkan Wars.

Dalmatian coast that ended up under Italian control. Pavelić's dictatorial puppet state, indebted to both Germany and Italy, had inherited a large number of non-Croats, especially Serbs, who were excluded in the ethno-nationalist concept of the new regime. The NDH's racial policies and brutal repression of its now substantial Serb minority led to an increasing spiral of violence between the Ustaše and various guerrilla movements, such as the Serbian nationalist Četniks and the communist-led Partisans (see Ramet 2006; Goldstein 2006; Bergholz 2016). Following the model of their Nazi patrons, the Ustaše almost immediately after coming to power began implementing the methods of the Holocaust against the NDH's Jewish population. The regime operated a network of concentration camps such as Danica, Jadovno, and Jasenovac, in which Serbs, Jews, Roma, Croatian antifascists – namely anyone deemed undesirable by the Ustaše – were incarcerated and/or killed. In the four years it existed, the Ustaša regime was responsible for tens of thousands of deaths (Mataušić 2003; see also Korb 2010; Yeomans 2013). The NDH ultimately ceased to exist in 1945, following the triumph of the antifascist Partisan movement and the victory of the antifascist coalition in Europe.[13]

The end of WWII in Europe resulted with the NDH sharing its fate with the defeated Axis powers. Ustaša armed forces and other Yugoslav collaborators attempted to retreat through Slovenia and surrender to the British in Austria, many failed to escape. Namely, the goal of the Ustaše was to avoid being captured by the Communist Partisans (Kralj 2019: 172). Even though tens of thousands of collaborators had managed to make it to British lines, the wartime policy was to return prisoners to their country of origin, so many of the captured Ustaše, NDH soldiers, as well as civilians, were executed by the Partisan units in what was subsequently known as the Bleiburg Massacres and Death Marches. The destruction of the NDH meant that former supporters of the regime were faced with either staying in the new communist Yugoslavia and facing some form of repression from the authorities, or going back to the status of political exiles (Kralj 2019: 169).

Not long after the war the victorious Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito launched a campaign of "repressive erasure" in order to banish any remnants of the Ustaša regime; this was accomplished on the symbolic level, "but also involved a general ban of political rights and public service for the Ustashe and their collaborators" (Kralj 2019: 172). Even after the extensive bloodletting immediately after the war, there were still 10,000 convictions in 1947. As Kralj further elaborates, many of those convicted were the Ustaše who either returned to Yugoslavia or stayed in the country after the war; organizing terrorist cells

[13] The documentary series about the origins and character of the NDH is available (for now in Croatian only) on the Croatian online platform https://hrti.hrt.hr/home. Directed by the historian Hrvoje Klasić, the 12-episode series includes insights by experts from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, and Great Britain, and includes rich archival material.

with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the Yugoslav regime was their main agenda (2019: 172).

While the widespread imposition of the communist revolution included occasional appeals to Brotherhood and Unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) – one of the cornerstones of the Yugoslav ideology – it was less a reconciliatory policy directed towards "dealing with the past". Rather, the aim was to establish a level of amnesia that would reinforce the belief that all peoples (*narodi*) contributed to the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba*) in order for the society to move forward (see, e.g., Kisić-Kolanović 1993; Radelić 2011).

Mate Nikola Tokić writes that after the war an estimated 12,000 former fascist collaborators and anti-communists from Croatia found political asylum in Germany (2009: 740). Even more found a way – between 20,000 to 40,000 – through the so-called Ratlines that were run by Croatian Francisan priests to Argentina[14], Uruguay, Spain, the United States, Canada, and Australia (Nikola Tokić 2009: 741). Between 1947 and 1949, at least 7,250 Croat émigrés reached Argentina, many of them former officials in the NDH (Adriano, Cingolani 2018).

3.2. "Ready for the Homeland" (*Za dom spremni*)

The ZDS salute was the official salute of the Independent State of Croatia led by the Ustaša regime. It was used in declarations and documents that were part of rigorous racial laws and genocidal policies that resulted in the murder of Serbs, Roma, Jews, and antifascists in concentration camps, prisons, and many other execution sites. During socialist Yugoslavia the salute was banned but reappeared during the 1990s Yugoslav Wars when it was used by paramilitaries, such as the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS – *Hrvatske obrambene snage*)[15], and popularized by right-wing politicians. As a consequence of becoming inter-twined with the dominant narrative about the *Homeland War* as a solely

[14] As Nikolina Židek points out, many of those who escaped found a safe haven in Argentina and other South American countries where they "developed a specific identity due to the historic context of its exile: the military defeat, the loss of an independent state, the post-war killings and forced migration represented a trauma that served as a unifying force of identity across generations" (2019: 211). Most members of the Croatian diaspora – in Argentina and other places worldwide – remain closely linked to their homeland. Some also have close ties with Croatia's radical right parties and continue to perpetuate a sympathetic and favorable view of the NDH and the Ustaša regime.

[15] The main difference between military and paramilitary, as Iva Vukušić explains, is in the application of violence. Namely, "military violence, when it acts with respect to law and rules of engagement, is always restrained" (2023: 6). While there is little scholarly consensus about what the term "paramilitary" means, it can broadly be understood "as a system in which a state has relationships with irregular armed groups that carry out violence" (Vukušić 2023: 6). For a more thorough overview of the various conceptualizations of the term – and their implications – see Iva Vukušić's book *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia. State Connections and Patterns of Violence* (2023).

defensive and just war, any criticism of the salute is usually framed as an attack on the official war narrative and the legacy of war.

For many proponents of the salute, the first line of defense is that it dates to the sixteenth century and therefore cannot be associated primarily to its use by the Ustaša regime. There are indeed certain versions of the salute that date back to the sixteenth century, but not the exact phrase. Specifically, political scientist Dario Brentin explains that Nikola Šubić Zrinski, a Croatian-Hungarian nobleman and general, supposedly cried out "For the? home(land), now into battle" during the Battle of Szigetvár in 1566 (2016: 4). Another Croatian nobleman used it as motivation for his soldiers a few centuries later, when it was somewhat modified into "For the home(land)" and the troops answered, "ready to die." The opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinski,* composed in 1876, features the aria *U boj, u boj* (To battle, to battle) that allegedly resulted in the popularity of ZDS among the wider public as proof that the salute predates its "misuse" by the Ustaše. However, scholarly research has since disproved this myth and confirmed that the dominant symbolic content of ZDS is tied exclusively to the Ustaša movement before and during WWII.

3.3. *Za dom spremni* as a symbol

Understanding the functions of symbols in post-conflict societies helps shed light on the various processes of identity construction, as well as how different symbols are utilized in diverse contexts, what the implications of this process are for the society in question and their relationships with other countries, especially those with whom they were in conflict. Of related relevance for this dissertation are divisive symbols – such as *Za dom spremni* – that according to a conceptual model elaborated by Moeschberger and DeZalia – can serve (but are not limited to) four interrelated functions: "(1) connection to past generations, (2) elicit a strong emotional reaction, (3) to express and maintain cultural narratives as they contribute to social representations, and (4) a perceptual filter to understand the self in relation to society" (2014: 2).

As a connection to past generations, symbols are a relevant mechanism of cultural memory; namely, symbols transmit texts, plotlines, and other semiotic formations from one cultural layer to another (Lotman 1990: 102–119). Symbols can accumulate old messages that can take up new shape in new cultural contexts and communicative situations, such as the three cases of ZDS demonstrate in the articles included in this dissertation. As such, they can trigger different memories and interpretations of the past, as well as shape political discourse and approaches to dealing with traumatic pasts. As Moeschberger and DeZalia point out (2014: 3), symbols can reinforce social bonds and shape different remembrance practices, which in turn shapes lived reality in the context in question. These are aspects I focus more on in articles II and III.

The second function of symbols – eliciting a strong emotional reaction – is one that seems an inherent part of any post-conflict setting due to a strong

emotional attachment to a certain symbol (see, e.g., Perak, Pavlaković 2017). I also cover this in articles II and III, where I show how ZDS triggered heated reactions from various social actors and groups that led to a complex web of conflicted meanings tied to Croatia's WWII and *Homeland War* legacies. Concretely, the fact that ZDS had become intertwined with the *Homeland War* narrative hindered – and still does – attempts aimed towards mitigating the implications and associated harms of its use in public. Accordingly, and based on the ZDS dynamic, symbols cannot operate in isolation; they are part of a rich web of cultural narratives that are shaped and reinforced by the values, customs, norms, and myths of a given culture (see also Gavrilović, Perica 2011). They have the capacity to trigger cultural narratives that carry formative significance for the society and/or community in question, such as in the case of the *Homeland War* narrative.

The fourth proposed function of symbols is that they also serve "as a cognitive filter and anchor point for individuals to assimilate and interpret new information in relation to culture" (Moeschberger, DeZalia 2014: 5). In this sense, symbols can strengthen group cohesion, reinforce boundaries between *us* and *them*, and they can also serve as schema allowing individuals to make sense of their lived experiences (Moeschberger, DeZalia 2014: 5). While I address this dimension more thoroughly in article II, it is present as an underlying thread in my other publications as well and centers mainly around politicians and war veterans and their efforts in advancing a one-sided perspective of the past in order to advance their political agendas in the present.

3.4. The Croatian War of Independence (*Homeland War*, 1991–1995)

The *Homeland War* was one in the series of large-scale conflicts that ultimately resulted in the disintegration of the Yugoslav state into seven successor states. There were various factors and different tensions that led up to the war during the 1980s, such as economic dysfunction, outside interests due to shifting post-communist geopolitics, clashing visions of political regimes, territorial autonomy and independence, minority rights implications, and ethnic separatism (for a thorough insight into the Yugoslav Wars, see Baker 2015; also, Gagnon 2004; Jović 2009). This section provides a concise overview with the aim of ensuring enough background context while at the same time not burdening the readers with overwhelming historical content. I focus on specific dimensions of the war that are pertinent to my dissertation such as language, nationalism, and the media.

Following the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia saw the rise of economic crises and the presence of nationalist politicians who challenged the existing communist establishment. It should be pointed out that the economic causes of the Yugoslav crisis had already developed before Tito's death, rather than considering the symbolic rupture his death led to as the trigger (Baker

2015: 25). As Catherine Baker writes, some of the bitterest arguments about 1980s Yugoslavia – both inside and outside scholarship – revolve around the issue of blame, while "historians' interpretations of the 1980s crisis reveal much about what they believe caused the 1990s wars" (2015: 24).

With the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, Croatia and neighboring Slovenia sought independence after failed attempts to reform the state into a confederation. Serbs in Croatia, backed by Slobodan Milošević and the Yugoslav People's Army, tried to prevent these independence movements by force, which ultimately became a full-blown Serb-Croat conflict in Croatia and eventually spilled into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Specifically, while the situation between Serbs and Croats had become tense during the Log Revolution (*balvan revolucija*) – an insurrection that started in August 1990 in areas of Croatia populated by ethnic Serbs – an escalation of violence happened in spring 1991 and further escalated during summer and following Croatia's declaration of independence on 25 June. The violence culminated in November that same year with the siege and fall of the town of Vukovar in Eastern Slavonia. Both the Serbian and Croatian political leadership weaponized the media (addressed in more detail in a later section), depicting "the other side" as the enemy and advancing a polarizing view of the escalating crisis.[16] The Serbian leadership, for instance, often cited the legacy of the Ustaša movement as proof of Croatian fascism which some Croatian extreme nationalists glorified. This, however, served more as a justification to occupy parts of Croatia with an ethnic Serb population.

Backed by paramilitaries from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and supported by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav People's Army, rebel Croatian Serbs created the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK – *Republika Srpska Krajina*). Although Croatia was fully internationally recognized on 15 January 1992, the RSK occupied approximately 30% of Croatia's territory. Serb units committed numerous atrocities against the civilian population in multiple villages, expelled tens of thousands of non-Serbs from the territories they controlled, and engaged in attacks against the Croatian police and fledgling military (Pavlaković, Pauković 2019: 5). While not undertaken in equally large numbers, "Croatian armed forces and police were involved in disappearances and revenge killings of Serb civilians in Sisak, Osijek, Pakrac, Paulin Dvor, Gospić, and even in Zagreb" (2019: 5). Lasting another four years, the conflict resulted in approximately 20,000 deaths, hundreds of thousands of displaced persons, and 1,945 persons still listed as missing in early 2018 (Marijan 2016; Radelić 2006). The Croatian Army eventually liberated much of the territory with military operations in 1995, which resulted in a regional peace treaty – the Dayton Peace Accords – and the peaceful reintegration of all internationally recognized Croatian territory by 1998.

[16] Feral Tribune was the main opposition weekly in the 1990s that provided critical and satirical commentary to political and social events in Croatia and neighboring countries.

3.5. The radical right in Croatia

Although my dissertation does not exclusively focus on the radical right, it is still a relevant dimension of my study since the ZDS salute is often – if not predominantly – used among right-wing and radical right individuals, groups, and political parties in Croatia. This section is two-fold; I first introduce some of the main actors of the Croatian radical right that are of relevance to this thesis, which is followed by considerations concerning the implications of the term "radical right" more generally. Accordingly, I consider some of the main characteristics of the term in the context of the salute's presence and use in Croatia following independence.

Some of the main actors of the Croatian radical right are the following: the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP – *Hrvatska stranka prava*), the Croatian Pure Party of Rights (HČSP – *Hrvatska čista stranka prava*), and the Autochthonous Croatian Party of Rights (A-HSP – *Autohtona hrvatska stranka prava*). In addition to the three aforementioned parties, the radical right scene in Croatia includes non-partisan actors such as the YouTuber Veljko Bojanić who has been accused of propagating hate speech and nationalist websites such as *narod.hr*.[17] In what follows, I briefly introduce some parties that represent the radical right in Croatia.

HSP was officially established on 25 February 1990 by Dobroslav Paraga and Ante Paradžik, both nationalist dissidents during socialist Yugoslavia. Initially imagined as the continuation of the homonymous political organization that was active in Austria-Hungary during the late 19th century, between 1991 and 1993 HSP established and dispatched its paramilitary units, the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS – *Hrvatske obrambene snage*), to battle zones in Eastern Croatia and Croatian-inhabited regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Petsinis 2022: 78; see also Veselinović 2016). As outlined in their basic principles, HSP opposes "the concession of any rights that would grant other ethnic groups state-building capacities inside the territory of the Croatian state".[18] HSP has been repeatedly accused of attempting to rehabilitate the ideology of the Ustaša regime, which is more thoroughly addressed in my second article.

HČSP was founded on 12 December 1992, and it claims continuity from the original Croatian Pure Party of Rights that was established in 1895. Similar to HSP, HČSP has been accused of historical revisionism as well as the attempt to rehabilitate NDH along with the Ustaša movement. In their official program, HČSP pledges to defend the national sovereignty and prosperity of Croatia; safeguard the values of family, homeland, and Christianity; nationalize banks; combat corruption; protect the dignity of the *Homeland War* and its legacies; "de-Communize" through lustration; renegotiate Croatia's EU membership; grant material and political support to the ethnic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina; cooperate with the Croatian diaspora abroad; and revise state legislation

[17] https://narod.hr/

[18] The basic principles of HSP are available here: https://hsp.hr/temeljna-nacela-hsp/.

on minority rights (see Petsinis 2022).[19] Among some of the events that HČSP actively participated in were the protests against "the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script in Vukovar, the recognition of same-sex marriages, and the accommodation of refugees and other migrants on Croatian soil" (Petsinis 2019: 79). Much like HSP, the HČSP party is fairly weak and has no representatives in the Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*).

Lastly, A-HSP was founded in 2005 and it is the smallest among the three most visible radical right parties in Croatia. The party opposes Croatia's membership in the EU and NATO and advocates for the establishment of a "Greater Croatia". Furthermore, A-HSP has been accused of instigating hatred and antagonism against the ethnic Serb minority on multiple occasions, as well as openly perpetuating historical revisionism and supporting the ZDS salute.[20] As Petsinis writes, what differentiates this party from the previous two is that A-HSP emphasizes the alleged "cultural exceptionalism and uniqueness of the Croatian nation and civilization" (2019: 79).

The newest contender from the right – the Homeland Movement (*Domovinski pokret*), was established on 29 February 2020 by the former singer and TV-host Miroslav Škoro. Škoro and the Homeland Movement have built a stronghold in the war-ravaged territories of Slavonia, and they have set their priorities as follows: "a) safeguarding of national and Christian values; b) stricter control of immigration and tougher 'law and order' measures; and c) revision of certain clauses in the legislation on minority rights, especially as far as the representation of the ethnic Serb community is concerned" (Petsinis 2022: 80; see also Čepo 2017). Prior to the 2020 July parliamentary elections, Croatia's Serb minority had become a target of inflammatory political rhetoric and hate speech, such as explicit calls for violence and the appearance of anti-Serb graffiti.[21] The Homeland Movement ultimately gained sixteen parliamentary seats, which was an unexpectedly good result for a newly formed party. However, their negotiation power was neutralized as a result of the landslide victory achieved by the HDZ and the subsequent coalition with two minor centrist parties.[22]

Although international scholarship contains many contributions dedicated to the study of right-wing parties, the main problem – much like with hate speech – lies in definitions and terminological ambiguities. Specifically, political scientist Cas Mudde found 23 terms, some of which include the radical right, extreme right, far right, radical right populism, ultra-right, national populism, and others (Mudde 2007: 11–12; see also Ramet 1999). The problem with terminology is the interchangeable use of the various terms that results in con-

[19] The HČSP program is available here: http://hcsp.hr/program/.

[20] The official website of A-HSP is available here: https://www.hrvatskipravasi.hr/.

[21] "Croatia Election Campaign Haunted by Anti-Serb Rhetoric", available on: https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/18/croatian-election-campaign-haunted-by-anti-serb-rhetoric/.

[22] "Croatian elections 2020: The Green Wave reaches Croatia", available on: https://cz.boell.org/en/2020/07/08/croatian-elections-2020-green-wave-reaches-croatia.

ceptual inconsistency (Veselinović 2016a: 60). However, there are two terms that do prevail: extreme right and radical right. The term *radical right* was first used by Seymour Martin Lipset in 1952. when he explained McCarthyism in his article in the context of American social sciences (Mulloy 2004: 17). Later on, the term was adopted by many European political scientists as well and has been used more or less consistently. Pippa Norris, for instance, claims that the *radical right* is the most appropriate term (Norris 2005: 46) that has been widely used in the American social sciences since 1963 and one which is also employed by the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution. The term is also practical since it helps avoid attaching labels to more complex parties and organizations prematurely (see also Obućina 2012).[23]

Sabrina Ramet further notes that the central core in the ideology of the radical right is the battle against the *Other* as the enemy and essentially against difference (Ramet 1999: 4). I demonstrate some of the meaning-making patterns that are characteristic for the aforementioned dynamic in article II, where I analyze the hermetic sphere of communication surrounding the case of the Ustaša salute appearing on a HOS memorial plaque manifested in the orientation towards normative texts, antithetical modeling, and taboo signifiers.

Political scientist Vedran Obućina points out the constituent elements of the radical right in Croatia as manifested through:

> an emphasis on the Ustaša movement during the Second World War, the creation of a strong state with an authoritarian character, territorial expansion of Croatia to its ethnic borders, especially vis-à-vis the Serbs, and a messianic mission of the Croatian nation as a bulwark of Catholic Christianity (2012: 3).

Since taking over HDZ in 2016, prime minister Andrej Plenković vowed to free the party from chauvinist rhetoric and to turn it into a modern conservative party, and he indeed managed to remove many extreme elements that were part of HDZ. Initially, the HDZ was a product of Croatia's first president's idea of national reconciliation; Franjo Tuđman, also the founder of HDZ, united both the sympathizers of the Ustaša and Partisan movement around the idea of an independent Croatian state, which in turn facilitated the relativization and proliferation of Ustaša insignia (see, e.g., Pauković 2012; Đurašković 2016). Since then, HDZ's politics of history has been characterized by the ideology of ethnic nationalism that was particularly explicit in the early 1990s during the Yugoslav wars (Koren 2019).

[23] There are, of course, different positions regarding the utility of the terms *radical right* and *extreme right*. As mentioned in my second article, I use the term *radical right* for the sake of simplicity and consistency. For a more thorough discussion concerning the advantages of the term *extreme* as opposed to *radical* can be found in Piero Ignazi's *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (2006) and Elisabeth Carter's *The Extreme Right in Western Europe* (2005).

3.6. The war narrative

The dominant narrative about the Croatian *Homeland War* considers it as being primarily a defensive war, and that it was "not only about saving the Croatian state, but a struggle to preserve the Croatian nation from annihilation" (Pavlaković 2014: 19). By acknowledging the *Homeland War* solely as a defensive war, numerous war crimes perpetrated from the side of the Croatian army and war generals have been observed as heroic acts rather than crimes (see Clark 2009; Pavlaković 2010; Jović 2012; Ljubojević 2019). This view is further exacerbated by different political parties, but first and foremost by the fact that the *Homeland War* has been, to this day, the principal event for the subsequent nation-building processes and the formation of Croatian national identity. Symbolic nation-building[24] incorporates symbols and rituals as crucial parts for the construction and consolidation of identities (see Pavlaković 2014 for a thorough account of symbolic nation-building strategies in Croatia). The political uses of symbols therefore become an inseparable part of any political agenda, and as pointed out by David Kertzer, "Without rites and symbols there are not nations" and accordingly, "people derive a good deal of satisfaction from participation in a ritual" (1988: 14).

This narrative was a central part of the post-conflict nation-building process, when one of the main aims of the HDZ – the political party that came to power in 1991 – was to sever all ties with Yugoslavia and provide a sense of continuity of the Croatian state. The importance of the war narrative lies in its status as "a kind of a founding or re-founding myth in Croatia" (Sokolić, 2019: 149) that serves the common function of helping society explain its origins, values, and meanings they attach to particular events (see Eliade 1963; Hosking, Schöpflin 1997). The Bosnian Scholar Ugo Vlaisavljević discusses the implications of war narratives in post-conflict societies in his essay "War as the Most Important Cultural Event" (2009). He asserts that "in national cultures which have fought throughout their entire history just to survive – and not just against extermination in war but against assimilation in peacetime – war assumed the meaning of a big, perhaps the most important, cultural event and a significant historical event that has the implications of a cultural revolution" (Vlaisavljević 2009: 25). The importance of the war narrative for Croatian society can be illustrated by the fact that the institutionalized version was established in the

[24] In the introduction of the book *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in South Eastern Europe*, Pål Kolstø provides insight into the processes and strategies that lead up to the establishment of nation-states, commonly referred to as nation-building, Kolstø distinguishes between the state creation of the 'old' nation states of Western Europe as the first wave of nation-building, decolonization in the 1960s as the second wave, and the nation-building following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as the third wave. In the book, the authors use the term *nation-building* to investigate "strategies of identity consolidation within states" and in this respect distinguish it from *state-building*, which they define as the administrative, economic, and military basis of functional states. Nation-building, however, refers primarily to processes of constructing a shared identity and a sense of unity among the population (Kolstø 2014: 2–3).

year 2000, when the Croatian Parliament introduced the Homeland War Declaration (*Deklaracija o Domovinskom ratu*) including one of the most prominent points calling for a univocal acceptance of the meanings and values attached to the *Homeland War* (a dimension I discuss in greater detail in articles II and III).

The Croatian war narrative revolves around the notion "that the war was defensive; that it was an attempt to create a democratic Croatian state […]; that a distinction must be made between the Greater Serbian aggressor and the victim; that the most recent war memory must be kept alive; and that the war heroes must be protected" (Sokolić 2019: 149). I introduce some of the features of the war narrative in my second article, although a more detailed overview is needed to demonstrate the connection with ZDS more clearly. Based on Ivor Sokolić's research concerning the reproduction and perception of the war narrative, he introduces the core components of the narrative as follows (2019: 149–151):

Defense: The conflict is seen as an act of self-defense against an aggressor, which is often employed in order to justify other actions such as Croat war crimes (Jović 2009a; Sokolić 2019).[25] The fact that the war narrative has been institutionalized as solely defensive is one of its dominant characteristics and as such, it does not leave space for additional voices and perspectives,[26] which becomes particularly prominent during national commemorations parliamentary elections.

Survival and struggle: Based on the transcripts from the interviews he conducted, Sokolić points out a common reference to the war and the war veterans as "bare-footed" or "bare-armed" Croatian soldiers who were able to fight off the aggressors (i.e., the Serbs) without any preparation (2019: 150). Another related dimension worth noting is when Croatia's wartime president Franjo Tuđman recruited prisoners to go into war early in the 1990s; the same as members of HOS units, they were usually praised as heroes who immediately went to war, no questions asked.

Aggressors: The most frequent references include "Serbs/Serbia", "Greater Serbs/Serbia", "JNA" (*i.e., Yugoslav People's Army*), "Chetniks", or any combination of these words, such as "Serbo-chetniks" (Sokolić 2019: 150). Furthermore, in the political discourse of the 1990s, "Yugoslavia was systematically characterized as the 'Dungeon of the Croatian nation' (*tamnica hrvatskog naro-*

[25] The violence committed during the war in Croatia included crimes against humanity, sexual violence, ethnic cleansing, and other war crimes. Croatia's cooperation with the ICTY was a long and controversial one, first and foremost due to the fact that Croatia "was prone to cooperate with the ICTY only if it was recognized as a victim of Serbian aggression and was reluctant especially regarding the crimes committed by the members of the Croatian army" (Ljubojević, 2019: 177-178). Among the main obstacles to Croatia's EU membership were precisely issues of transitional justice and the delayed cooperation with the ICTY.

[26] While there are certainly scholars, NGOs, youth initiatives, and politicians who are engaged in facilitating an open and critical approach to the war legacy, those efforts are hindered by the ruling political elites who rely on the one-sided war narrative to mobilize voters and political agendas.

da)" (Pavlaković 2014: 32), and specific phrases emerged that reflected that tendency. The 'aggressors' were referred to as 'Yugocommunists' or the above mentioned 'Serbo-chetniks', while Croatian soldiers were usually 'knights' (*vitezi*) and martyrs (*mučenici*) (ibid.).

Yugoslavia as broken: This part of the narrative is more tied to the nation-building narrative than the war narrative, although they often overlap, as Sokolić emphasizes. Namely, many aspects of Yugoslavia's dissolution such as refugees and the appearance of extremist groups are today associated with the Yugoslav state itself rather than its violent break-up (Pavlaković 2014: 32). This relates to a wider social practice that has been prevalent in recent years, and which includes the erasure or marginalization of various elements belonging to the Yugoslav legacy, such as the process of renaming streets and squares.[27]

Victimization: The Croatian victimization narrative is tied to specific events that took place during the 1990s conflict, such as the destruction of the cities of Vukovar and Dubrovnik. As Sokolić writes, the interviewees predominantly referred to the aforementioned focal points, but also made a distinction between "us, Croats, the victims" and "them, Serbs, the aggressors" (2019: 151). The reproduction of the victimization narrative continues through annual commemorations, political speeches, and the use of various symbols and insignia related to the *Homeland War* (see Pavlaković and Pauković 2019; Banjeglav 2019; Perak 2019), such as the ZDS salute and its use by HOS veterans. I open this dimension further in my second article, where I demonstrate how the use of the salute by specific actors – such as HOS veterans and right-wing politicians – reinforces binary thinking and the reproduction of categories "us – the victims", and "them – the aggressors." In both articles II and III, I further show how ZDS has become intertwined with the enshrined war narrative and justified as a symbol of defense during the *Homeland War,* which further hinders attempts to decisively counter its use.

The war is not over: According to Sokolić's findings, the last component of the war narrative is a shared perception among certain war veterans' groups and organizations that the *Homeland War* – or at least the struggle for Croatian independence – is not over (2019: 151). Sokolić highlights multiple reasons expressed by participants as to why this is the case, such as: the perception according to which Greater Serbian forces are still present, attempts by the international community (for instance, international tribunals or the EU) to take away Croatian independence, or claims according to which the Croatian government "works against Croatia" and that it has been infiltrated (2019: 151), primarily by Serb representatives that are attempting to undermine Croatian society. The perception that the *war is not over* can also be detected in the form

[27] "Croatia's Far-Right Rewrites Tito Out of History", online: http://balkanist.net/rewriting-tito-out-of-croatias-history/.

of "a war over the interpretation of the war" (Jović 2017),[28] a thread that is present in the articles included in my dissertation.

When I went through the initial phase of conducting interviews with war veterans in early 2020[29], all the above-mentioned components of the war narrative remained prominent. Another more general theme – also present in Sokolić's research – came to the fore, and it relates to war veterans' feelings of marginalization (2019: 152–154). In my sample specifically, war veterans referred to the Croatian government "as liars and thieves" and expressed a general disappointment regarding the ways in which the country they fought for and created had not developed in ways they had hoped it would. This, as Sokolić elaborates, motivates war veterans to keep the memory of the war alive since that memory maintains their central position in society (2019: 153). Further, they perceive themselves as still fighting for Croatia, which was reflected in some of the interviews I conducted when some veterans expressed the importance of "telling the truth about the war".

The centrality of the war narrative is reinforced predominantly by the ruling HDZ party, as well as from the side of different mnemonic actors, most notably radical right politicians and war veterans' organizations. One of the salient consequences of the latter is not only the exclusion of different perspectives about the war, but also the marginalization of communities and individuals that attempt to share them, ranging from journalists, researchers, politicians, and last but not least, the Serb minority. Therefore, those who do not espouse to the prevailing interpretation of the war or simply dare to question it are deemed enemies, traitors, or the *other*. This results with the symbolic reproduction of Serbs as the enemy; as Dejan Jović writes, "even if there would be no Serbs left in Croatia, the reproduction of the *other* would continue by proclaiming certain citizens as not pure enough or not Croatian enough" (2017: 27).

As I demonstrate in my dissertation and primarily in articles II and III, the ZDS salute has acquired the function of a carrier of the established narrative and interpretation of the war. While this is most prominent among right-wing politicians and organizations, it has also become a consistent aspect in other cultural layers, such as commemorative events (I cover this specifically in article III) and consequently spills into wider debates surrounding the war legacy that results with the reinforcement of the established narrative. The appropriation of

[28] In 2014, the then president of the HDZ party Tomislav Karamarko, stated that when it comes to the legacy of the *Homeland War*, people would be allowed to say what they want in private, since the war, the defenders, as well as the legacy of the first president's political doctrine are not to be questioned, as reported on by Jasmin Klarić on the Telegram online portal: https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/znate-onu-karamarkovu-recenicu-o-slobodi-govora-u-svoja-cetiri-zida-izgleda-da-je-sve-vise-zivimo/. Around the same time, a well-known judge, and the president of a County Court, asked for changes be made to the Penal Code so that the negation of the *Homeland War* as solely defensive would be punished by prison.

[29] This, as I mention in more detail in the conclusions section, was a part of my research disrupted by the pandemic.

the salute by war veterans during the 1990s war – predominantly by former members of HOS – contributed to the solidification of the salute's attributed meanings tied to defense, heroism, and sacrifice, despite ongoing criticism and backlash from international and local organizations, educators, researchers, and certain politicians. In the section that follows I introduce the position and role of 1990s war veterans in Croatia more widely since they are crucial actors when it comes to the maintenance of the 1990s war narrative.

3.7. Croatia's war veterans

War veterans of the *Homeland War* in Croatia maintain a high position in society and politics, first and foremost in terms of their central relation to (and in) the war narrative (Sokolić 2019; see also, Jović 2017). Commonly referred to as *branitelji* or "defenders", they are considered as the embodiment of the Croatian war narrative of sacrifice, defense, and victimhood (see Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019) and are often referred to as the creators of the Croatian republic in political and media discourse (Fisher 2003; Pavlaković 2014; Jović 2017; Sokolić 2019; Jakir 2019).

As emphasized by Ivor Sokolić in his study about war veterans and how they construct the world around them within the frames of the war narrative (2019), veterans are a highly important object of study for three main reasons: "their potential to cause public disruption, their role in the transmission of norms, and their political closeness to the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ – *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*)" (Sokolić 2019: 143). As a result of the veterans' close ties to the ruling party, they have been able to exploit symbols to further their political aims, and "during the 1990s, the associations had nearly exclusive access to state funding, benefited from relatively positive media coverage and were relatively unified in their actions" (Sokolić 2019: 144; see also, Car 2008; Lamont 2010). As Marko Soldić points out in his thesis "A Land fit for Heroes: Croatian Veterans of the Homeland War" (2009), the *branitelj*[30] is conceptualized as "the potent actor which defended, and thus facilitated the rebirth of Croatia by unselfishly sacrificing on 'the altar of the Fatherland'" (2009: 23).

Branitelj status is regulated by the "Law about Croatian Defenders from the Homeland War and the Members of their Families". It was initially passed in 2004 and amended in December 2017, October 2019, and most recently in July 2021.[31] Article 3 defines a *branitelj* as an "individual who participated in the

[30] The word *branitelj* has a further normative significance; it is considered "safe" since it cannot be confused with Serbian (*branilac*), as well as with Yugoslavia, where a veteran was a *borac* (Soldić 2009). The separation of Serbo-Croatian during the 1990s war has been analyzed by the socio-linguist Snježana Kordić in her book "Jezik i nacionalizam" (*Language and Nationalism*) published in 2010. In the book Kordić argues that Croatian undergone a purification process in the 1990s as a result of nationalistic politics of the HDZ.

[31] Available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_07_84_1556.html (accessed 9 December 2022).

organized defense of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia as a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia" or as an armed member of the Narodna zaštita (*National Defense*), initially created by the HDZ in 1991 as a civilian organization in order to assist the government amid rising tensions with the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA – *Jugoslavenska narodna armija*).

Political scientist Danijela Dolenec points out that the veterans' rights were legislated from 1994 onwards, while significant changes to the legislation were made in 1996, 2001, and 2004. Namely, "by 2004, the law accorded 37 different material entitlements to this population, most importantly including pensions, disability compensation, paid health and care services, priority in securing housing, child allowance, unemployment benefits, financial help in securing employment, tax cuts, scholarships, guaranteed university entry, and many more" (Dolenec 2017: 63). The veterans' registry was kept secret for almost twenty years and made public only in 2012 under the government led by the Social Democrats (SDP). In 2013, the SDP reported the number of veterans at 503,112, which included 13,700 additional persons that seemed to have been added to the official registry between 2008 and 2012 (Dolenec 2017: 63), making the manipulation with the registry a persistent issue to date. The number of over 500,000 veterans is certainly hard to believe in a country of just over 4 million.

The relevance of war veterans for Croatia's political life is likely best epitomized in the 555-days long protest that took place from 2014 to 2016 and represented "the most serious threat to Croatia's legal institutions since independence" (Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019: 11; see also Milekić 2022). The protest was initiated mid-October 2014 by a group of veterans in front of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs (*Ministarstvo branitelja*) in the capital of Zagreb and launched by the Association of 100 Per Cent Handicapped Croatian Defenders and its president, Đuro Glogoški, as well as Josip Klemm, president of the Association of veterans of the special police and director of a security company.[32] The aim of the protest was to remove the then war veterans' minister Predrag Matić and his assistant Bojan Glavašević. The trigger for the protest was Glavašević's statement made at a conference in September 2014 concerning the rights of the civilian victims of wars in Vukovar, where he stated that research is needed regarding the presence of post-traumatic stress disorder among civilians who remained in Serb-occupied areas of Croatia during the war.[33] This led to a heated reaction from war veterans led by the Headquarters for Defence of Croatian Vukovar campaign group, who accused Glavašević for downplaying Croatian war veterans' suffering.

[32] "Croatian war veterans: Coup de théâtre or coup d'état?", online: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/80310/.

[33] "Croatian war veterans end 18-month-long protest", online: https://balkaninsight.com/2016/04/26/croatian-war-veterans-end-1-5-year-long-protest-04-26-2016/.

Receiving permits for setting up tents and similar structures is not easy to come by since the government and the city of Zagreb are generally strict about it and "no permits were ever issued for the tents that stood in front of the ministry for over a year" (Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019: 12). When taking into account that the protest ended up lasting for 555 days, the aforementioned fact becomes more mindboggling. However, despite these violations, HDZ politicians and the then president-elect Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, regularly visited the veterans in the tent. This situation pointed to a rather clear support from the HDZ. With numerous gatherings taking place on the main square during the protest, the leaders repeatedly claimed that their sacrifices in the 1990s were not adequately rewarded.

While the demand for Matić's and Glavašević's resignation appeared to be the main one, other requests of the protesters were not clearly articulated and changed during the protest. However, many demands were repeatedly pointed out, with some being fairly antagonistic. As Boduszyński and Pavlaković write, one consistent demand was for the laws regulating veterans' statuses to be enshrined in a single constitutional law; this would make it more difficult for future governments to alter their privileges and benefits (2019: 12). A sore spot for the veterans was also the Registry of Veterans that was made public by the ministry, the purpose of which was to make transparent the list of individuals who had received veteran status. Among the more antagonistic demands was the one made by some right-wing groups who called for the creation of a Registry of Aggressors; this perpetuated the practice of framing Serbs as the main enemy of the Croatian people, and it might have increased the sense of insecurity among Croatia's remaining Serb population.

As a result of a number of tents being erected in front of the ministry and the veterans' showing no intention of leaving, the media started referring to the event as the Tent Protest and the veterans as "tentmen" (*šatoraši*). The protest was framed as a continuation of the *Homeland War* and yet another struggle against communists and Yugoslavs, with protesters repeatedly claiming Croatia as their creation. Political scientist Dejan Jović elaborates on the importance of creation for the *branitelji* population by emphasizing that they developed an interpretation according to which they consider themselves Creators of the state. Consequently, and as Jović goes on to explain, this implies that creating something means owning it, which further makes the protesters – i.e., the *branitelji* – the rightful owners of Croatia and the only ones who can freely interpret its past and decide on its present and future (2017: 29).

The 18-month long Tent Protest saw multiple marches, clashes with the police that took a violent turn, and even the death of a disabled female veteran, Nevenka Topalušić, due to poor health. The elections in November 2015 resulted with a coalition government between the HDZ and a newly formed third party, MOST (*Bridge*). During the campaign, the then HDZ president Tomislav Karamarko presented the HDZ as the true defender of the *branitelji* and the culture of victory (Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019: 12–13), which further strengthened the symbolic status of war veterans in Croatia. The protesters

eventually dismantled the tents in May 2016, primarily due to Tomo Medved (HDZ) having been appointed as head of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs, which meant that the key demand of the protesters was satisfied.

Another category of 1990s war veterans are former members of the HOS paramilitary unit that was under the control of the radical right-wing Croatian Party of Rights. Having declared its own armed force to defend the country as war approached in 1990–1991, the party – led by commander Dobroslav Paraga and general chief of staff Ante Paradžik[34] – formed HOS partly because the Croatian authorities did not launch a general military mobilization, but also because they were critical of Tuđman's handling of the Yugoslav crisis. The soldiers actively and purposefully used Ustaša symbols to evoke the memory of the Ustaša regime and the NDH (Veselinović 2019; see also Koren 2011). Even the HOS acronym referred to the one used by the Ustaša armed forces in 1944–1945. When it comes to the ZDS salute, it was used as the official salute and occasionally accompanied by the physical Nazi salute. Moreover, HOS members paraded in black uniforms – that resembled Ustaša uniforms – sang Ustaša songs, and celebrated 10 April, the founding day of the NDH in 1941, which they continue to regularly commemorate.

Various wartime HOS transgressions – such as their role in killings, shootings, fights, and the destruction of WWII anti-fascist monuments[35], had been reported on by Croatian mainstream media. However, as Milekić emphasizes[36], many of the 3,000 anti-fascist monuments were also vandalized by regular Croatian units, locals, and political party activists. HOS was incorporated into the official military in 1992–1993 and subsequently recognized in a law passed by a center-left government in 2001. Securing veteran status was challenging if HOS soldiers had not also served in the Croatian army after having been incorporated into the official Croatian military. Nowadays, HOS veterans remain in a contentious position due to their insistence on using Ustaša symbols – primarily the ZDS salute – while seeking the same respect given to other *branitelji*.

[34] For a thorough account of Paradžik's political activity, see Veselinović's article "Politička djelatnost Ante Paradžika", published in 2016.

[35] See also the publication by Vjeran Pavlaković titled *Memoryscapes of the Homeland War* (2022), available both in English and Croatian: https://yihr.hr/system/publication/document/32/memoryscapes_en_web.pdf.

[36] "Croatia's 1990s paramilitaries: from government critics to collaborators", online: https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/06/croatians-1990s-paramilitaries-from-government-critics-to-collaborators/.

4. LANGUAGE AND NATIONALISM

While the intertwinement of language and nationalism is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter, a basic insight into the dynamic in the context relevant for the study is important in order to provide an insight into the climate in which the *Za dom spremni* salute had resurfaced and proliferated. Accordingly, this chapter provides a brief overview regarding the intricacies of wartime language and media and their role in enemy construction fueled by nationalist politics, while a later section focuses on the laws and regulations on hate speech in Croatia and their implications.

Language and scripts play a significant role in the construction of national belonging (see, e.g., Greenberg 2001). The South Slav nations have closely related languages and defining them has always been a political act (Baker 2015: 113), with Croatian being a specific case since standard Croatian is based on the same dialect as standard Serbian. In times of large-scale crises, such as those triggered during wars, the interplay between language, belonging, and the negotiation of identity becomes that more prominent, and Croatia was no exception.

In the context of the 1990s Yugoslav Wars, the most contentious language politics was related to "Serbo-Croatian" and instrumentalized with the goal of further advancing national and ethnic tensions and polarization (Baker 2015; see also Kordić 2010). Historically, the case of "Serbo-Croatian" was peculiar when compared to other languages spoken in Yugoslavia. Namely, Slovenian was established as separate before 1918 while socialist Yugoslavia recognized Macedonian as separate from Bulgarian. Boundaries between other languages spoken in Yugoslavia were clearer than was the case with "Serbo-Croatian." Twentieth-century "Serbo-Croatian" had two main variants: "ijekavian" as spoken in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and "ekavian", as spoken in Serbia and eastern Bosnia (Baker 2015: 114). However, while there were – and are – some differences in vocabulary and grammar, nothing impeded understanding between them (see Kordić 2010).

The boundaries did, however, harden during the twentieth century, most notably after the NDH was established in 1941, during which the Ustaše attempted to "purify" the Croatian language of Serbian (Baker 2015: 53–56).

The 1990s brought about a new wave of language politics that often relied on the controversial legacy of the Ustaša regime. The 1990s wartime period witnessed an extreme form of purification, when books written by Serb authors were thrown away, burnt, and removed from Croatian libraries (see Komnenović 2022). This tendency towards extreme forms of language purism is tightly intertwined with nationalism; according to Snježana Kordić, "purism exacerbates nationalism because it teaches that everything should be classified as Croatian or non-Croatian, and that everything coming from one's own nation is proclaimed as good, while everything coming from other nations is proclaimed harmful and evil" (2010: 17). Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that

Croatian purism targeted allegedly Serb words since Croatian nationalism targeted Serbs. While Latin and Cyrillic have both been in use in Croatia in different periods (see, e.g., Gabelica 2014), the 1990s witnessed Cyrillic becoming almost exclusively connected with Serbian language and nationalism (Šarić and Felberg 2017: 52).

Some activities and interventions that characterized culture and language during and shortly after the Yugoslav Wars also included the revival of old Croatian vocabulary that was not used in Serbian. In addition, linguists in 1991–1994 "created new words based on medieval roots, stating that Croatian had been suppressed under Yugoslav Communism and could now develop independently" (Baker 2015: 115). Books in ekavian or in Cyrillic scripts were removed by and from public libraries based on the "justification" that the books in question were Serbian. Language policy in the 1990s was used to create and reinforce symbolic boundaries between Croats and Serbs and ultimately exclude Serbs and their language (Baker 2015; see also Škiljan 2000; Kordić 2010).

Nowadays symbolic meanings surrounding Cyrillic have remained a recurring topic in Croatia's public discourse. Often times, discussions about the use of Cyrillic triggered more heated debates that had led to protests and demonstrations. For instance, in 2013 an attempt to activate the law allowing the display of plaques in Cyrillic on public buildings in the Croatian town of Vukovar triggered disputes and protests both in Vukovar and other places in Croatia. The attempt triggered the mobilization of war veterans who protested and argued that the city of Vukovar was sacred due to its suffering in 1991[37], while Cyrillic was associated with the "script of the aggressor" in right-wing discourse (Šarić and Felberg 2017). War veterans' organizations formed the Headquarters for the Defense of Croatian Vukovar (*Stožer za obranu hrvatskog Vukovara*) that facilitated the mobilization of other groups in Croatia. The same organization held a large protest in Zagreb in April 2013, which escalated when

[37] The city's sensitive history is made even more difficult given the fact that it is often a political arena concerning minority rights, specifically Serbs living in Vukovar. Among one of the most dominant associations attributed to the city of Vukovar is the one according to which the city had to suffer in order for Croatia to thrive. This symbolic burden that the city carries became a hindrance for its development and various NGO's and civic organizations often point out the role of media in depicting Vukovar primarily as a war-torn city. Among one of the main actors active in maintaining the war narrative in Vukovar is the city's mayor, Ivan Penava, himself a part of different controversies. One of them included the act of calling out Serb pupils for not standing up when the Croatian hymn was sung. Croat and Serb pupils in elementary and high schools attend separate curricula, which means that division has been a dominant part of their lives. Not long after Penava's statement, a pupil attending the Serb curricula was attacked by two of his peers attending the Croat curricula. It is not clear if there was a direct correlation between Penava's act and the attack; regardless, he has not been a figure prone to fostering dialogue but rather furthering and fueling existing divisions. The victimization narrative also transcends national boundaries due to the rights that were given to the Croatian diaspora by the HDZ party in the 1990s, with Argentina as the most significant example of exercising those rights and communicating memory and narratives of identity transnationally and trans-generationally (Židek 2019).

local authorities attempted to place signs on buildings, resulting in veterans attacking the signs with hammers (Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019). While the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia (*Ustavni zakon o pravima nacionalnih manjina*), enacted in 2002, guarantees the right to use Cyrillic, veterans appealed to the symbolic status of Vukovar and argued that its [Vukovar's] "sacredness transcended the rule of law" (Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019: 11).

Croatian war veterans – along with politicians – are the main actors that regularly attempt to (re)establish or maintain the enshrined war narrative, and with it the symbolic boundaries between Croats and Serbs. Languages, scripts, and symbols remain some of the dominant tools for doing so, especially due to their potential to evoke an emotional response and a sense of belonging to a given community. When fueled by traumatic memories and experiences, these tools become that much more powerful elements with the capacity of either facilitating a sense of community or deepening perceived or actual polarization and antagonism. The next sub-section briefly addresses precisely this dimension while focusing on the role of national media and its (mis)use by Croatian and Serbian politicians during the 1990s wars.

4.1. Producing the *Other* in the *Homeland War*

> In Serbian newspapers, articles about World War Two Ustaša camps began to appear (and nobody could dispute their truthfulness since camps did exist and Serbs, Roma, Jews, as well as Croats disappeared from them). Pictures of those camps began to appear more often on Serbian television. Croats were referred to as criminals, Ustaše. Serbian newspapers were full of horrifying stories about "necklaces made out of fingers of Serb children", worn by Croatian Ustaše, about the "genocide" that the Croats are once again preparing against innocent Serbs. The Serbian media propaganda (orchestrated by the Serbian government and Serbian leader) finally accomplished what it set out to: a reaction in the Croatian media. And once the Croatian media also filled with stories about "necklaces made out of fingers of Croat children", worn by Serbian "butchers" around their necks – preparations for war were finished (Ugrešić in Kurspahić 2003: 78).

In his invaluable book titled *Zločin u 19:30 – Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*[38] and published in 2003, the journalist Kemal Kurspahić guides readers through the complex interplay of politics, media, and nationalism during the 1990s Yugoslav Wars (see also Thompson 1999). An often disturbing and heart-breaking account of the latter – which Kurspahić largely based on various interviews with journalists from the region – demonstrates how the regional media contributed to the polarization and group antagonism after shifting their loyalties from Yugoslavia's communist party to nationalist ideologues.

[38] The book is available in English as well under the title "Prime Crime Time: Balkan Media in War and Peace."

In the hands of Slobodan Milošević – the president of Serbia from 1989 until 1997 – the majority of wartime Serbian media systematically spread fear among Serbs from alleged genocidal threats from "shiptar separatists", which is a derogatory term for Albanians, as well as from Croatian "Ustaše", and Bosnian-Muslim "mudžahedins". As demonstrated by the quote in the beginning of this section, the media were instrumental in mobilizing people through creating an atmosphere of danger.

While under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman and his HDZ party, the Croatian media did not hold back when it came to depicting Serbs and Bosnians as mortal enemies. Moreover, the media often depicted Croats as the guardians of European values and protectors from "Byzantine" (i.e., Serbian) and "Islamic-fundamentalist" (i.e., Bosnian) barbarians (Kurspahić 2003: XII).

In the early days of the party's rule, president Tuđman and the HDZ encouraged extreme nationalist tendencies, which predominantly revolved around the symbols and legacy of NDH. Streets and squares were renamed, all with the purpose of promoting "Croatianness", which symbolically culminated when cans of "fresh Croatian air" were sold at the main square in the capital of Zagreb (Kurspahić 2003: 75). Not surprisingly, this state of affairs led to a heated response from Serbian media, which described it as "threats against a new genocide" and called to "protect Serbs from Ustaša vampires" (Kurspahić 2003: 75). As the following quote aptly demonstrates:

> It is important to understand that Croatian ultranationalists found the perfect excuse in the very real threat that was coming from Belgrade. Croatian nationalism – while it had always existed – never would have took on such proportions were it not for Milošević's politics that already from the start contained territorial pretensions toward parts of Croatia populated by Serbs, and even encouraged Croatia to separate "without the historical Serbian territories." There are documents – such as the published journal of the former president of the Presidency of Yugoslavia (Borisav) Jović – about the plans of the Serbian leadership regarding the separation of two-thirds of Croatia from Yugoslavia, while a third of Croatia would belong to "Great Serbia" as part of the plan "all Serbs in one state." That situation that contained a real threat from Serbia, combined with its pressure aimed toward redrawing borders, caused an almost natural state of emergency in Croatia in which everything – including the majority of the leading media – was mobilized for the defense of the homeland (Kurspahić 2003: 76).

4.2. Hate speech laws and regulations in Croatia

In this section I provide an overview of the main laws and regulations related to hate speech in Croatia more widely and Ustaša insignia specifically. As mentioned in the introductory sections, it remains a challenge to provide a consistent and non-ambiguous definition of hate speech. This, however, should not come as a surprise since there are numerous aspects that influence this, such as the peculiarities of the local context, customs, habits, and cultural norms, as well as historical legacies. For instance, while the hate speech syntagm is part of both the American and European vocabularies, the fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that hate speech is not incriminated in the United States – as opposed to European practices – but largely falls under the interpretation of the defense of freedom of speech through the prism of the First Amendment[39] (for more thorough discussions, see, e.g., Greenawalt 1995; Hare and Weinstein 2009; Waldron 2012; Herz and Molnar 2012; Brown 2015; Belavusau 2013)

Political scientist Hrvoje Cvijanović points out the polemic and sensitive nature of the criminalization of speech in Croatia "since it is often critically referred to as verbal delict, i.e., a mark of inappropriate or anti-state speech that was penalized as such by the Penal Code of former Yugoslavia" (2016: 98). Accordingly, as Cvijanović writes, it becomes that much more complex to develop "a stance toward the criminalization of speech, the regulation of the speech space, and ultimately hate speech in Croatia" (2016: 98; see also Alaburić 2003; Hlebec and Gardašević 2021).

In Croatia, freedom of speech is guaranteed based on fundamental legal documents; specifically, in the Constitution, it is guaranteed based on article 38., which includes the freedom of press and other means of public information, freedom of speech and public appearance, and the freedom for the establishment of institutions for public communication. Article 39. forbids any calls or incitement to war and the use of violence, incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred or any other form of intolerance. What regards Croatian Penal Code, the article 325., namely "Public incitement toward violence and hatred" (*Javno poticanje na nasilje i mržnju*) was introduced into the Croatian legislation during the country's accession to the European Union and led to the

[39] The First Amendment of the US Constitution states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances", available online at https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript?fbclid=IwAR0BPSft4avSH6hbeoIzjdAUrjX9X0Ed_cVstNoUpA22pDfymqmrg7W6Ckc. However, so-called "fighting words" are not protected under the First Amendment, as ruled by the Supreme Court in 1942. "Fighting words" are defined as "those which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of peace." This was a landmark decision defined in "Chaplinsky v New Hampshire", when the Court determined that a Jehovah's Witness, Walter Chaplinsky, cursed a local marshal as a "God-damned racketeer" and "damned fascist." Available at online at: https://www.thefire.org/news/80-years-ago-supreme-court-introduced-fighting-words.

inclusion of aspects of the "European Union's general decisions about racism and xenophobia" (*Okvirne odluke o rasizmu i ksenofobiji Europske unije*). Article 325. of Croatia's Penal Code prescribes punishment for:

1) Anyone who, either via print, radio, television, computer system or network, at a public gathering or in any other way publicly incites or makes publicly available leaflets, pictures, or other materials that serve as a call for violence or hatred directed toward a group of people or a member of a group based on their racial, religious, national, or ethnic belonging, origin, skin color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or any other traits, will be sentenced to prison for up to three years.
2) Anyone who organizes or leads a group of three or more people in order to commit acts from paragraph 1. in this article, will be sentenced to prison ranging from six months to five years.
3) Anyone who participates in the association from paragraph 2. in this article, will be sentenced to prison for up to one year.
4) Anyone who publicly approves, denies, or significantly denies the felony of genocide, a crime of aggression, crime against humanity, or war crimes, directed toward a group of people or a member of group based on their racial, religious, national, or ethnic belonging, origin or skin color, in a way that can incite violence or hatred toward such a group or a member of such a group, will be punished with the sentence from paragraph 1. in this article.[40]

Hate speech is also regulated by the "Law concerning electronic media" (*Zakon o elektroničkim medijima*), with article 12, paragraph 2. stating the following:

> In audio and/or audiovisual media services, it is not allowed to incite, facilitate incitement and spread hatred or discrimination based on race or ethnic belonging or skin color, sex, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, financial status, trade union membership, education, social status, marital or family status, age, health condition, disability, genetic heritage, gender identity, expression or sexual orientation, ideas stemming from antisemitism and xenophobia, fascism, nationalism, communism and other totalitarian regimes.[41]

Misdemeanor law was usually applied when certain behaviors were perceived as hate speech; specifically, the old "Law regarding misdemeanors against public order and peace" (*Zakon o prekršajima protiv javnog reda i mira*[42]). Cvijanović explains that articles based on which sentencing was – or could be applied – included any type of expression that offends a certain perception

[40] https://www.zakon.hr/z/98/Kazneni-zakon
[41] https://www.zakon.hr/z/196/Zakon-o-elektroni%C4%8Dkim-medijima
[42] https://www.zakon.hr/z/279/Zakon-o-prekr%C5%A1ajima-protiv-javnog-reda-i-mira

regarding what constitutes public order (2016: 100). However, the aforementioned articles sanction controversial verbal and symbolic speech that could be political, such as expressing dissatisfaction or anger over a certain situation and state of affairs. Articles 1., 5. and 6. of misdemeanor law are the basis for misdemeanor charges, as stated in what follows:

> Article 1.
> Misdemeanors against public order and peace are actions that consist of prohibited ways of disturbing peace, work, or the normal way of citizens' lives, creates unrest, indisposition, agitation, or disrupts citizens' movement on streets and other public places or disturbs the realization of their rights and obligations, offends moral, disturbs the execution of legal measures executed by state bodies and official persons, threatens the general safety of people and assets, offends state bodies or in any other way disturbs the citizens' public order and peace and other actions determined by this law.
>
> Article 5.
> Anyone who disturbs public order and peace by performing, reproducing songs, compositions, and texts or by wearing or highlighting symbols, texts, pictures, drawings, will be punished for the misdemeanor with a money fine in the counter value of the domestic currency in the amount of 50 to 300 DEM [German mark] or sentenced to prison for up to 30 days.
>
> Article 6.
> Anyone who acts in a particularly insolent and inappropriate way in a public space and offends citizens or disrupts their peace, will be punished for the misdemeanor with a money fine in the counter value of the domestic currency in the amount of 50 to 350 DEM or sentenced to prison for up to 30 days.

The above is, indeed, a wide and ambiguous interpretation of the potential disruption of public order and peace, according to which, as emphasized by Cvijanović, any provocative expression may be sanctioned (2016: 101). He further goes on to specify multiple issues with that type of categorization; from equating the act of blasting any type of loud music with the same act, but with music that may be perceived as hate speech, to equating a nude photo with a photo containing a certain totalitarian symbol (Cvijanović 2016: 101). More importantly, said example of the misdemeanor law contributes to the arbitrariness in limiting the freedom of speech and viewing the space for speech as a space of conflict and polemic since it potentially turns controversial verbal and symbolic expressions into misdemeanors against public order and peace (Cvijanović 2016: 101).

It is also problematic to specify what it actually means for a particular type of symbolism to be deemed as a misdemeanor against public order and peace and moreover, how can the intensity of inappropriateness allegedly evoked in citizens be measured and determined (Cvijanović 2016; Dangerous Speech Project 2021). The *Za dom spremni* salute has been a consistent part of debates related to the aforementioned aspects, with certain cases more prominent than others. The case of Šimunić chanting the salute after the winning match at the 2013 World Cup play-off aptly demonstrates this. Specifically, the Misdemeanor Court determined that the salute is impermissible and that Šimunić "was aware that the chant 'Za dom' accompanied with the response 'Spremni' symbolizes the official salute of the totalitarian NDH regime, namely that as such it represents the manifestation of a racist ideology, contempt towards other people on the basis of their religious and ethnic belonging, and the trivializing of the victims of crimes against humanity."[43] Another example opened a different dimension of the issue in the case of ZDS use during the commemoration of Operation Storm (*Oluja*) in the city of Knin in 2011. The Court issued an acquittal along with an explanation stating that the Court "is not aware that the 'Za dom spremni' inscription", as well as any black objects, would have the character to facilitate national, religious, or any other form of hatred or intolerance, and that the "salute 'Za dom spremni' is familiar throughout Croatian history from the time of Šubić and Zrinski and as such does not constitute the so-called Ustaša criterion."[44]

There is no doubt that verbal and symbolic expressions can be offensive, but what makes the legal and social categorization so difficult to determine is the fact that the offensiveness of a given expression is a matter of a particular perspective and established cultural values, rather than it being universal. Moreover, "a particular perspective" is virtually impossible to legally frame and sanction, and it also belongs in the sphere of etiquette, not that of law. As Cvijanović points out, it is crucial to distinguish between hate speech articulated by individuals and social groups from the one that is articulated or condoned by the state apparatus (2016: 116). The latter is certainly more dangerous as it reflects the official position of the state in question. While there are politicians that voice their concern and opposition towards the use of ZDS, the salute has been largely relativized and downplayed by the ruling government. To date, there has been no tangible progress regarding the regulation of the salute nor concrete and long-term efforts to approach the contested war legacies in a constructive manner that is conducive to dialogue and prioritizes educational and civic initiatives.

[43] https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/zalba-prihvacena-joe-simunic-preblago-je-kaznjen-za-povik-za-dom-spremni-ba784168-b1ca-11eb-b290-0242ac150013

[44] This is not correct as research has demonstrated that the *Za dom spremni* salute was used in that specific form by the Ustaše in the NDH and functioned as the main symbol of the regime.

5. RESEARCH ON HATE SPEECH AND CONTESTED SYMBOLS

As is often the case with interdisciplinary approaches, outlining a concise yet thorough overview of existing scholarly contributions poses a challenge. Since the articles included in this thesis each present a historiography on a given dimension of their topic, here I aim to provide an overview about general tendencies and interests present in international as well as local scholarly contributions that are pertinent to my research focus and aligned with the cultural semiotic approach. With brevity in mind, I concentrate primarily on those publications that mostly influenced and guided my dissertation.

The Semiotics of Racism: Approaches in Critical Discourse Studies (2001) is one such contribution. The authors advance the assumption that racist, nationalist, ethnic, and sexist prejudice are formed, reproduced, and legitimized through discourse (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 1), with emphasis on accounting for the sociopolitical and historical, situational, text-internal, inter-textual, and inter-discursive dimensions of the research object in question and its context (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 40; 2009). In relation to ZDS as my research object, I analyzed how the salute was constructed in media discourse, with particular emphasis on the evaluations and assigned positive or negative traits associated with it (Reisigl, Wodak 2009). The relevance of context accompanied with the principle according to which texts and discourses are always linked to other texts and discourses in the past and present helped me shed light on particular national narratives that ZDS triggered and that in turn facilitated a specific image of the national community (see also Kimminich, Erdmann, and Dizdarević 2018).

A contribution that proved both inspiring and eye-opening for my dissertation – and closely related to the above-mentioned approach – was *Speaking for the Nation: Intellectuals and Nation-building in the Post-Yugoslav Space* (2020). The author analyzed various ways through which intellectuals in post-Yugoslav societies – specifically Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina – promote particular representations of the nation in public discourse while attempting to strengthen and legitimize their own position (Sicurella 2020). While I did not focus on intellectuals, I analyzed media texts from diverse political affiliations with the purpose of identifying linguistic strategies that were employed in order to legitimize and delegitimize the salute (see article III in this dissertation). Accordingly, I was interested first and foremost in the type of justification employed in relation to ZDS, such as references to authority and/or value systems (Leeuwen 2007; 2008). These tendencies may facilitate a particular perception of the issue of the salute among the wider public and consequently play a role in determining how it should be addressed.

Through relying predominantly on cultural semiotics, I further sought to analyze the ways in which the salute triggers enclosed autocommunication, meaning that it is directed towards maintaining the existing *us – them* boundary,

as well as forming associations based on predetermined meanings (see article II in this dissertation). While Lotman theorizes about the potential of autocommunication to trigger self-reflection and the re-organization of internal codes or values (Lotman 1990) – for example, of a person or a community – I focus on the capacity of autocommunication to hinder dialogue and reaffirm established hierarchies surrounding the salute. In doing so, I build upon contemporary developments and applications of Lotman's concepts such as in the analysis of online communication of the Estonian extreme right (Madisson 2016), autocommunicative tendencies among extreme right groups (Madisson, Ventsel 2016), as well as a semiotic approach to strategic conspiracy narratives (Madisson, Ventsel 2020; Hansson, Madisson, Ventsel 2022), among others.[45] The aforementioned contributions helped me in analyzing interpretive frames and signification tendencies surrounding communicative practices that are directed towards reinforcing rigid boundaries, as well as to propose a cultural semiotic framework that can facilitate the analysis of hate speech and contested symbols on the example of ZDS (see articles II and III). Furthermore, in his chapter dedicated to conceptual dialogues and applications between Lotman and cultural studies, Marek Steedman applies the concept of autocommunication to analyze political communication and the reproduction of social stereotypes (2006: 136–159). I develop a similar angle in article II by demonstrating the dominants of enclosed autocommunicative meaning-making associated with the ZDS salute.

In recent years – predominantly since 2016 – local scholarly contributions have largely approached the ZDS salute through the disciplinary lenses of history, memory studies, and political science. However, ZDS was rarely the central research object of those endeavors; rather, it was an accompanying aspect of scholarly work dedicated to memory politics and memory wars tied to the legacies of WWII and the *Homeland War* (such as, for instance, in the works of Pavlaković, Brentin, and Pauković 2018; Pavlaković, Pauković 2019; Blanuša 2017). Other contributions that have inspired and guided my research explored Croatian citizens' attitudes concerning the regulation of hate speech and contentious symbols while taking into account the legacies of WWII and specifically the fascist Ustaša regime (Blanuša, Kulenović 2018). While I do not delve into the intricacies of hate speech regulation, I consider the semiotic approach crucial when it comes to related considerations since it takes into account the various dimensions of meaning-making patterns associated with hate speech and contested symbols – such as the narratives and ideas that reinforce them – rather than solely advocating prohibition and/or conducting a normative evaluation.

Dario Brentin, for instance, analyzed the case of the ZDS salute as intertwined with football extremism and remembrance practices in Croatia (2016). Considering the crucial role that sport has had for Croatia's (post)conflict

[45] Other works are addressed in the corresponding articles that are included in this dissertation. I chose not to cover them in the current section to avoid repetition and for the sake of brevity.

nation-building practices (see also Brentin 2013), the author analyzes debates surrounding the ZDS while demonstrating the importance of football for the construction and dissemination of social memory (Brentin 2016). By synthesizing the ideas brought forth by the aforementioned authors, I have developed my dissertation based on the starting point that views ZDS as one of the main symbols through which national identity has been reified in the past years, specifically after Croatia entered EU. I place the salute in a wider meaning-making framework and introduce the specific semiotic mechanisms that shed light on the socio-communicative functions of ZDS, as well as the qualitative dimensions of problems that ZDS quantifies, such as the legacies of WWII and the *Homeland War,* along with the competing actors and discourses.

6. AN OVERVIEW OF ANALYZED SOURCES

This section aims to provide an overview of the main sources used in my dissertation. The material for my case studies originates from three sources: right-wing public Facebook pages, a controversial memorial plaque with the inscription of the salute, and opinion pieces published in print media.

Article I analyzed the online semiotic dynamic of *Za dom spremni* and associated xenophobic expressions, while the data were extracted from the following right-wing public Facebook pages: Velimir Bujanec, Direktno.hr, Dnevno.hr, Željko Glasnović, HČSP (*Croatian Pure Party of Rights*), HSP-AS (*Croatian Party of Rights Dr. Ante Starčević*), Kamenjar, Most nezavisnih lista (*Bridge of Independent Lists*), Narod.hr (*The People*), Priznajem! Hrvat sam (*I admit! I am a Croat*), Projekt Velebit (*Project Velebit*), Sloboda.hr (*Freedom*), Urbana desnica (*The Urban Right*), Večernji.hr, and Vigilare. From the total of 4.5 million postings published by readers on the listed pages, those containing the *Za dom spremni* salute and its variations were filtered.

Posts and associated discussion, such as comments and replies, were acquired at least two weeks after the date the post was published. After this was accomplished, the collected data were structured in a relational database and prepared for analysis by my co-author, Filip Rodik. It should be pointed out that due to the analysis including a smaller number of public Facebook pages, their content cannot be viewed as representative for Facebook in Croatia. As emphasized by my co-author, in order to collect an absolute number of occurrences of a word and/or phrase, full access to the whole Facebook base is needed. Lastly, the data presented in this paper consist of textual fragments while other multimodal features such as images or figures are not considered.

Article II focused on the meaning-making surrounding a memorial plaque containing the *Za dom spremni* salute that HOS veterans had erected near the Jasenovac Concentration Camp Memorial Site. In addition to presenting relevant reactions to the plaque from politicians and war veterans, I relied on the Croatian *Homeland War Declaration* (2000) and the *Dialogue Document* that was issued in 2018. Drafted by the Council for Dealing with Consequences of the Rule of Non-Democratic Regimes that was created as a direct result of the controversy around the plaque, the *Dialogue Document* served as an attempt to solve the seemingly irreconcilable perspectives associated with ZDS in Croatian society. As for the *Homeland War Declaration,* it functions as the institutionalized self-description related to Croatia's post-conflict national identity.

In **Article III** I focused on print media – specifically opinion pieces – about *Za dom spremni* published in daily and weekly newspapers in April, May, and June 2020. My initial data set included thirty media texts, in which I identified the relevant opinion pieces based on the title or skimming through the text in case the title did not uncover sufficient information. While constructing my final sample, I concentrated on opinion pieces that were published shortly after several commemorative events in which *Za dom spremni* appeared discursively

most salient. Lastly, I downsized the sample based on where the salute featured most prominently, which ultimately resulted in nine media texts.

7. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF ARTICLES AND THE MAIN IDEAS PROPOSED THEREIN

7.1. Article I. Ready for the Homeland: Hate speech on Croatian right-wing Facebook pages

Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations, 2018, 20(3), 31–52

Online hate speech has become one of the central topics related to the dissemination of extremist thoughts and agendas; research on the topic has been increasing since this article was published, with more questions appearing and centering around various digital conflicts that we witness on a daily basis (see, e.g., Bankov 2020; Partanen 2022). While hate speech already carries the burden of being difficult – if not impossible – to define in clear terms, online hate speech brings more challenges, most notably striking the balance between regulating online hate speech and protecting the freedom of expression (see also Brown 2018).

Social media in particular have become an increasingly relevant symbolic battlefield when it comes to the formation and negotiation of national identities (see, e.g., Rutten, Fedor, and Zvereva 2013; Zeitzoff 2017). This becomes even more conspicuous in post-conflict contexts, especially those with long-standing grievances between groups and political agendas fueled with memory politics. The Croatian context is no exception to this dynamic and I was curious to shed more light on the nationalistically motivated hate speech that has become common in different communicative contexts while predominantly proliferating on different social media platforms.

However, the fact that nationalistically fueled hate speech is present on social media is no surprise nor does it uncover anything substantial. That is why this study was designed by combining a quantitative approach with semiotics of culture; the first accounted for the prevailing notions on some of the most active public right-wing Facebook pages by analyzing data collected between 2012 and 2017, while the second aimed to shed light on specific meaning-making mechanisms that shape hate speech and its online dynamic. The central example was that of the *Za dom spremni* salute, which was considered as a catalyst for the immediate notions that accompanied it. The main findings reflected the consistent opposition with the notion of the *Yugoslav,* which also evidenced the continuous rise of anti-communist politics of memory. Furthermore, and related to the aforementioned tendency, the idea of *Croatianness* was reproduced as the dominant self-description on the analyzed Facebook pages.

7.2. Article II. Cultural texts, enemies, and taboos: autocommunicative meaning-making surrounding the "Ready for the Homeland" Ustaša salute in Croatia

Social Semiotics, 2021*,* Advance online publication.

The war of symbols and the rise of nationalistically fueled hate speech have become prominent in contemporary Croatia and are predominantly reflected through the use of Ustaša insignia. While legacies of WWII and the *Homeland War* have triggered debates on multiple occasions in the past, a recent case almost toppled the government. Namely, on 5 November 2016 HOS veterans erected a memorial plaque to eleven fallen comrades near the Jasenovac Concentration Camp Memorial Site containing the Ustaša salute *Za dom spremni.*

The memorial plaque triggered both local and international backlash and caused an almost year-long debate among the political leadership in Croatia, ultimately resulting with the formation of the so-called Council for Coming to Terms with the Past (*Vijeće za suočavanje s prošlošću*). The Council consisted of scholars who attempted to respond to the controversy by compiling a document that would address not only the specific memorial plaque erected in Jasenovac, but the legacy of WWII symbols more widely.

The purpose of my research was to place the ZDS salute in a wider meaning-making framework that facilitates the understanding of the semiotic mechanisms upon which hate speech practices are built and reinforced. Accordingly, I have detected three main elements characteristic for enclosed meaning-making surrounding the salute. The first is the orientation towards normative texts that organize the further interpretation of the salute and fulfill a regulatory function reflected in the preservation of only one interpretation of the 1990s war. The second one – antithetical modeling – reinforces the *us-them* division and triggers the enemy-other code that symbolically separates Croatian society into those who favor the salute and therefore "love Croatia", and "non-Croats" who are critical of its presence and consequently accused of hating Croatia and being traitors. And the third element – taboo signifiers – helped me demonstrate taboo defense mechanisms that aim to exclude traumatic traces of the past that are tied to the salute. Because it revolves around reaffirming and reinforcing existing meanings and associations, the presented dynamic of enclosed meaning-making consequently greatly reduces the potential of new meaning generation.

7.3. Article III. "Ready for the Homeland" in Croatian media: commemorations, victory, and foundation

Sign Systems Studies, forthcoming

National commemorations have been the main arenas for political struggles in Croatia and they make an inseparable part of Croatia's memory culture (see Pavlaković, Pauković 2019). Commemorative events are often used to mobilize voters and further political agendas, which in turn reproduces ideological

cleavages in Croatian society. This becomes even more prominent when there is a change in political leadership, since this inevitably influences the shift in focus related to the legacies of WWII and the *Homeland War*.

Two cases that highlighted the aforementioned happened in late spring 2020, when the center-left former prime minister Zoran Milanović became Croatia's fifth president. Milanović participated in the annual commemoration in Jasenovac that honors victims of concentration camp and final breakout attempt of prisoners on 22 April 1945, and the marking of the Operation Flash (*Bljesak*) that marks the Croatian troops' success in retaking parts of Western Slavonia in May 1995. Both commemorations were marked by Milanović's criticism of the *Za dom spremni* salute; namely, Milanović first adamantly criticized the salute inscribed on a memorial plaque and called for its removal, which caused a backlash from some war veterans' organizations who considered the criticism as an attack on the legacy of the 1990s war. Not long after, the president attended the commemoration for Operation Flash, which he soon decided to leave because some of the attendees wore shirts with the ZDS salute. Overall, he claimed that those two instances of the use of the salute were a degradation of the victims as well as the legacy of the 1990s war.

While it is correct that the presidential function in Croatia remains symbolic, it does serve as "a highly visible stage for political elites and other memory actors to perform the past and define their political agendas within that frame" (Pavlaković, Pauković 2019: 2). This manifested in spring 2020 and once more confirmed the symbolic space of commemorative events as the main arena for political struggles and the uses of historical legacy to further political agendas and mobilize voters.

Za dom spremni has been an important part of the aforementioned dynamic; as one of the central symbols tied with the rise of nationalist tendencies in contemporary Croatia, its presence has been highlighted and contested on numerous occasions. Supported by individuals and parties who advocate radical right positions, the salute has become an important element for negotiating national identity in Croatia's post-war context. Accordingly, Milanović's criticism of the salute at the two commemorations mentioned above triggered a conflict of meanings surrounding the foundations of said identity.

While the commemorations served as the central stage for this symbolic conflict, what interested me was a closer look at the values and meanings that were subsequently (de)legitimized through discourse and further transmitted to the broader public through the media. To explore this, I articulated the research problem as follows: How is ZDS framed in the selected media texts following Milanović's criticism at the two commemorations? The guiding research questions that helped shed light on this were centered upon discovering 1) the salient discursive strategies and strategies of (de)legitimation surrounding ZDS and 2) the dominant discourse(s) upon which the national self-description has been built.

I identified four main themes in the analysis of selected media texts, where the salute was framed as (1) a symbol of heroism; (2) a part of political battles;

(3) a symbol of defense; and (4) unacceptable. The presented themes demonstrated the divisive role that WWII symbols continue to play in Croatian society and politics, a dynamic that becomes more prominent in times of crises and political radicalization, as well in post-socialist societies where there was a lack of open debate that would facilitate an adequate dealing with the past.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Croatian case – and specifically its state of "being stuck in the past" – remains a characteristic feature of the republic due to the constant and explicit presence of historical narratives and symbols in politics and society, and their consistent use in order to further political agendas and mobilize voters. At the same time, while struggling with legacies of the past hardly makes Croatia unique, it is the symbolic continuation of the *Homeland War* – propagated largely by politicians, war veterans, and radical right individuals and groups – that prevents the facilitation of an open and safe space for dialogue, which is crucial in creating a more favorable future that is built around *learning from the past* rather than obsessively fixating on it.

I was recently reminded of the complex layers of Croatian national identity, symbols, and historical narratives. In December 2022, Croatia's football team won the bronze medal at the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. After the official reception of the football players in the capital Zagreb – with almost 100,000 people gathered at the main square – the players continued to celebrate in different locations. Two football players – Dejan Lovren and Marcelo Brozović – celebrated in a bar and shouted *Za dom spremni*, while also singing nationalist songs associated with the *Homeland War* and nationalist politics of that time.[46] When Dario Brentin – a scholar researching sport and politics[47] in the Balkans – commented on the football players' actions while substantiating his claims with existing research, he was attacked on social media as a person who "hates Croatia and everything Croatian" and "a traitor", among others. The comments were not reserved for him only, but for anyone who had dared to criticize the use of the ZDS salute.[48] Yet again, the salute was defended with claims of it being a symbol of the 1990s war and of victory, despite scholarly research demonstrating otherwise.

I have, at times, questioned whether the ZDS salute is too narrow of a research object. During the course of my research, however, I have come to realize the rich and multifaceted nature of the various dimensions it opens. Namely, I have found myself as part of a larger semiosphere and the dynamic of

[46] "Lovren i Brozović urlaju Za dom spremni", available at: https://www.index.hr/sport/clanak/video-lovren-i-brozovic-urlaju-za-dom-spremni/2422344.aspx.

[47] For a better understanding of the role of sport for Croatia's national identity, see Dario Brentin's article 'A lofty battle for the nation': the social roles of sport in Tudjman's Croatia, published in 2013.

[48] Critical voices were not lacking and included scholars and reporters who are usually vocal regarding these issues, such as Dragan Markovina, available at: https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/vrijeme-je-da-se-reprezentacija-oslobodi-hdz-a-i-simbolike-desnice-svi-gradani-zele-navijati-za-vatrene/, Aleksandar Stanković, available at: https://www.index.hr/magazin/clanak/aleksandar-stankovic-ne-trebaju-mi-ambasadori-koji-se-opustaju-uz-za-dom-spremni/2422761.aspx, and Tomislav Klauški, available at: https://www.24sata.hr/news/od-josipa-simunica-do-dejana-lovrena-zar-doista-nismo-mogli-proci-bez-ustaskog-pozdrava-881108.

constant mutual dialogue that opens yet another door of inquiry and elaboration. In what follows I summarize the main conclusions presented in this dissertation, as well as possible future directions.

I have sought to demonstrate the potential of cultural semiotics in facilitating a more thorough analysis of the ZDS salute in contemporary Croatia by placing it in a wider meaning-making framework. In so doing, I found ZDS to present an increasingly relevant research object – and a means – that reflects processes of post-war identity building and serves as a mechanism of identity affirmation, but also contestation. While analyzing the salute in different semiotic environments, namely on social media, as part of commemorative events and memorials, and as represented in Croatian print media, the main conclusions of this dissertation are the following:

1. Cultural semiotics facilitates the analysis of hate speech and contested symbols by focusing on interpretative frames and meaning-making hierarchies they are a part of. Accordingly, each case of the *Za dom spremni* salute presented in this dissertation is an example of a specific dimension of Croatia's post-war identity building and various attempts of maintaining it by diverse actors.
2. Relying on the concept of autocommunication helped demonstrate the salute as part of enclosed meaning-making that revolves around (re)-constructing perceived enemies and maintaining and reinforcing existing associations. Difference – a key element for new meaning generation – is not acknowledged but remains perceived as a threat to the established identity narrative.
3. Combining cultural semiotics with the Discourse-Historical Approach and van Leeuwen's strategies of (de)legitimation proved fruitful in demonstrating the variety of meaning-making tendencies that the salute can trigger regarding Croatia's post-war identity, as well as the relevance of the underlying discourse of *victory and foundation* that the salute has become part of. This intertwinement makes it that more challenging to tackle productively since the *Homeland War* narrative – as emphasized on multiple occasions in this dissertation – serves to maintain a rigid and one-sided narrative reinforced largely by politicians and some war veterans' organizations.
4. Because of its simple texture, ZDS possesses greater signifying capacity and as such, it is able to acquire additional meanings that can co-exist. However, since ZDS was used specifically with the aim of evoking the Ustaša legacy during the *Homeland War*, its existing meaning as a fascist salute was reinforced.
5. The online dynamic of ZDS – coupled with the use of the concept of self-description – demonstrated the capacity of diverse textual fragments forming a coherent whole for Facebook users and serving the functions of online identity creation through excluding the *other* and

strengthening group ties, contesting or supporting authority figures, as well as making the issue more salient in public discourse.

One of the main limitations of my dissertation – as well as a potential future direction – is the lack of qualitative interviews with groups and individuals introduced and/or analyzed. A more holistic insight into the features and dynamics of meaning-making practices surrounding hate speech and contested symbols can be acquired through a more in-depth insight into individual accounts and perspectives of the phenomenon in question. I made concrete steps in this direction during 2019 and the first few months of 2020, when I prepared for – and conducted – interviews with Croatian war veterans with the aim of exploring different meanings they attach to the *Za dom spremni* salute. Since data collection was hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic, I decided not to prolong my doctoral research for more than it is necessary and to postpone that particular research segment.

The *Za dom spremni* salute and other Ustaša insignia have also been appearing as parts of graffiti and/or murals, with an overall increasing trend of the muralization of the *Homeland War*. Some of those murals support and reinforce the dominant war narrative, while others challenge it, making the visual dimension of national identity building and contestation a fruitful direction of inquiry. Questions such as what are the creators' motivations, how does the public perception differ, and how could (sometimes controversial) murals be used to facilitate dialogue about difficult topics, are only among some that can be explored.

A relevant dimension that my research opened stems from the field of futures studies that inspired my interests and sparked my curiosity during the second half of doctoral studies. Similar to my attempt to explore war veterans' perceptions of the salute, this did not make it to my dissertation, but remains in form of multiple drafts that I am looking forward to revisiting. Namely, once the humanities and social sciences were included in the study of the future around the 1970s, the future started to be observed more as "a set of possibilities that are envisioned, represented, debated over, designed, chosen, and fulfilled or disregarded by members of a community" (Pärn 2021: 109). Similar to the importance of questioning *whose* memories are acknowledged and given a voice when exploring remembrance practices, *who* is given the space for voicing images and scenarios of the future(s) is of vital importance since they can be equally (mis)used to further particular political (or other) agendas. At the same time, facilitating futures thinking, imagination, and an openness to difference and alternatives is crucial for any society's progress, especially for post-war identities built predominantly (or solely) around the past. Contested symbols – such as *Za dom spremni* – and war narratives can play a significant role in the process since they can be utilized to motivate us in questioning meanings that are often left unchecked and consider alternatives and scenarios of how we want our society to look while learning from the past rather than making it our present.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Vaenukõne ja vaidlustatud sümbolite semiootika: Ustaša saluut „Za dom spremni" tänapäevases Horvaatias

Käesolev doktoritöö analüüsib Teise maailmasõja aegse Ustaša saluudi *Za dom spremni* („Kodumaa jaoks valmis") ümber koonduvaid tähendusloome mustreid ja laiemaid tähendustamise praktikaid erisugustes kommunikatsiooniolukordades ja semiootilistes keskkondades. Täpsemalt keskenduvad töösse hõlmatud juhtumiuuringud 1) selle saluudi semiootilisele veebidünaamikale Horvaatia paremäärmuslikel Facebooki lehtedel; 2) saluudile kirjutatuna mälestustahvlile, mis on pühendatud 1990ndatel peetud Horvaatia iseseisvussõjas langenud sõduritele; ning 3) representeeritu ja raamistatuna meediadiskursuses, mis tekkis järjellainetusena kahele 2020. aasta kevadel toimunud riiklikule mälestusüritusele. Töö kontekstis mõistetakse tähendusloomet protsessina, mille kaudu üksikisikud, rühmad ning kogukonnad mõtestavad ja tõlgendavad tegevusi, sündmusi ja maailma, mille osaks ollakse.

Za dom spremni (edaspidi, ZDS) saluudist on saanud üks tähtsamaid elemente, mille kaudu vaieldakse läbi sõjajärgset riiklikku identiteeti ning kujundatakse poliitilisi agendasid. ZDSi roll mälusõdade vallapäästmises – mis lähtuvad Teise maailmasõja ja 1990ndate Iseseisvussõja traumaatilisest ja vaidlustatud pärandist – ning suhete mõjutamises naaberriikidega (nagu Serbia) on teinud temast kasvava tähtsusega uurimisobjekti.

ZDS oli Teise maailmasõja aegse Iseseisva Horvaatia Riigi (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska; edaspidi, NDH) ametlik saluut. NDH oli natsi-Saksamaa ja fašistliku Itaalia marionettriik, mis eksisteeris 1941.–1945. aastani. Valitsev Ustaša režiim kasutas saluuti mitmesugustes dokumentides ja deklaratsioonides, mis käisid kaasas karmide seaduste ja genotsiidsete poliitikatega, millele toetudes tapeti koonduslaagrites serblasi, juute, romasid ja eri rahvustest antifašiste (Mataušić 2003; vt ka Korb 2010). Sotsialistlikus Jugoslaavias saluut keelustati, kuid 1990ndate Horvaatia iseseisvussõja ajal kerkis see taas esile osana paremäärmuslikust poliitikast. Alates 1990ndate sõjast omastasid saluudi paremäärmuslikud poliitikud ja grupid Iseseisvussõja sümbolina. Jätkuvalt käsitatakse seda nii Horvaatias kui mitmes naaberriigis vaenukõnena, mida kasutatakse paremäärmuslike seisukohtade propageerimiseks. Tänini ei ole Horvaatias aga saluuti ega sellega kaasnevat Ustaša režiimiga seonduvat sümboolikat keelustatud.

Doktoritöö peamised eesmärgid – mis täidetakse vastavates artiklites – on järgmised. **Esimene eesmärk** on tuvastada saluuti ümbritseva tähendusloome suundumused ning sellest lähtuvad interaktsioonid aktorite – sõjaveteranide ja poliitikute – vahel, kes saluuti kas toetavad või vaidlustavad. Analüüsitakse, kuidas see dünaamika mõjutab laiemat katset tulla toime Teise maailmasõja aegse Ustaša pärandiga. **Teine eesmärk** on uurida, kuidas aitab kultuuri-

semiootika raamistik kaasa vaenukõne ja vaidlustatud sümbolite uurimisele ning rikastab nende mitmetahuliste nähtuste mõistmist. Siinkohal tasub märkida, et kultuurisemiootika ei lähene reaalsusele kogu tema mitmekesisuses ja terviklikkuses, vaid uurib märgipõhiseid mudeleid, mis on tavapäraselt lihtsustava iseloomuga. Töö toetub kultuurisemiootikale, sest see lubab uurida saluudiga seonduvaid tõlgenduslikke raame ja dominantseid tähendusloome hierarhiaid (I ja II teine artikkel). Töö **kolmas eesmärk** on tuua lotmanlik semiootika lähemale Horvaatia teaduslikule kontekstile ning näidata selle lähenemise rakendatavust antud teemale.

Toetudes kultuurisemiootikale, mõistetakse siin ZDSi ja selle ilminguid konkreetse mudeli või tõlgendusliku raamina sotsiaalsest tegelikkusest. Sellest lähtuvalt vaadeldakse ZDSi – ja selle staatust vaenukõne ning vaidlustatud sümboli ühe juhtumina – konkreetse informatsioonikorrastusena. Nagu kirjutatakse *Kultuurisemiootika teesides*, uurib kultuurisemiootika märgisüsteemide funktsionaalseid korrelatsioone (Ivanov jt 1998: 33) üldeesmärgiga seletada neid viise, kuidas märgisüsteemid tegelikkust modelleerivad. Töö lähenemise keskmes on uurida ja mõista ZDSi ümbritsevaid tähendusloome praktikaid. Seega peitub kultuurisemiootika tööriistakasti tähtsus ja väärtus selles, et ta võimaldab avada ja analüüsida dominantseid tähendusloome hierarhiaid, kuhu saluut kuulub.

I artikkel keskendub valikule Horvaatia paremäärmuslikest Facebooki lehtedest ning uurib, kuidas ebajärjekindlatest ja mõnikord isegi vasturääkivatest elementidest moodustatakse koherentne identiteedidiskursus. Sel eesmärgil võimaldas semiosfääriline lähenemine kaardistada valitud Facebooki lehtede ja kogutud andmete raames esile tulnud põhiväärtused ja tuvastada neis toimivad saluudiga seonduvad kommunikatiivsed funktsioonid. Seega tuvastab see artikkel valitud Facebooki lehtedel esile kerkinud kõne laadi ja selle esinemissageduse määratud ajaraamis (2012–2017). Teiseks määratakse ja visandatakse ZDSi kommunikatiivsed funktsioonid neil lehtedel.

II artikkel pakub välja raamistiku, mis aitab mõista semiootilisi mehhanisme, millele ehituvad vaenukõne praktikad ja mille kaudu neid võimendatakse. Samuti aitab raamistik aru saada, millised tähendustamise suundumused neid mehhanisme iseloomustavad. Artiklis näidatakse, kuidas teatavad dominantsed tähendusloome elemendid (näiteks tendents normatiivsete tekstide poole, antiteetilise modelleerimise kohalolu, tabutähistajad) viivad hermeetilise tähendusloome sfääri tekkimise ja võimendumiseni ning kuidas nad takistavad dialoogi esilekerkimist. Samuti rakendab artikkel Lotmani mõistet autokommunikatsioon, et süvendada arusaamist vaenukõne ja vaidlustatud sümbolite semiootilisest loogikast. Teksti mõistet kasutatakse, et näidata nende tekstide iseloomu, mille tekkimiseks andis ZDS tõuke selle järel, kui ta Horvaatia iseseisvussõja memoriaaltahvlile kirjutati. Lisaks reeglite või juhiste ettekirjutamisele ehk reguleeriva funktsiooni täitmisele – näiteks Iseseisvussõja Deklaratsiooni ja Dialoogi Dokumendis – hoiavad tekstid alal rühmadevahelisi sümboolseid eraldusjooni, mis võivad omakorda ahendada ruumi, milles ollakse valmis tunnustama ja vastu võtma alternatiive.

III artikkel tuvastab ja analüüsib tekstide ja tähendustamise suundumuste laiemaid sotsiokommunikatiivseid funktsioone. Sel eesmärgil analüüsitakse ZDSi ümbritsevat meediadiskursust, mis kerkis esile kahe riikliku mälestusürituse järellainetusena. Üritused toimusid 2020. aasta kevadel. Need juhtumid paljastavad *võidu ja algupära diskursuse* [*discourse of victory and foundation*], mis põhistab Horvaatia iseseisvumisjärgset identiteeti, millele pretendeerivad erinevad poliitilised jõud. Toetudes peaasjalikult Juri Lotmani mõistele enesekirjeldus, näitab artikkel, kuidas *võidu ja algupära diskursus* säilitab piiri *meie* ja *nende* vahel ning seekaudu reguleerib tähendusloome sfääri, mis ümbritseb Horvaatia iseseisvussõja pärandit.

Doktoritöö näitas kultuurisemiootika potentsiaali teostamaks sügavat analüüsi ZDSist tänapäeva Horvaatia kontekstis, kuna ta võimaldab selle asetada laiemasse tähendusloomeraami. Sedasi ilmus ZDS kasvava tähtsusega uurimisobjektina – ja -vahendina –, mis peegeldab sõjajärgse identiteediloome protsesse ning mis toimib identiteedi kinnitamise – aga ka vaidlustamise – mehhanismina. Analüüsides saluuti eri semiootilistes keskkondades (täpsemalt ühismeedias, osana mälestusüritustest ja memoriaalidest ning representeerituna Horvaatia trükimeedias), sai teha doktoritöö põhijäreldused:

1. Kultuurisemiootika aitab kaasa vaenukõne ja vaidlustatud sümbolite analüüsile, keskendudes tõlgenduslikele raamidele ja tähendusloome hierarhiatele, kuhu nad kuuluvad. Iga ZDSi juhtum siin töös näitlikustab konkreetset mõõdet Horvaatia sõjajärgsest identiteediloomest ja sellest, kuidas erinevad poliitilised jõud üritavad seda alal hoida.
2. Toetumine autokommunikatsiooni mõistele aitas ZDSi näidata osana suletud tähendusloomest, mis pöörleb ümber tajutud vaenlaste (re)konstrueerimise ning olemasolevate suhete säilitamise ja võimendamise. Erinevust, seda tähendusloome võtmeelementi, küll ei tunnustata, kuid tajutakse jätkuvalt ohuna omaksvõetud identiteedinarratiivile.
3. Kultuurisemiootika ühendamine diskursiiv-ajaloolise lähenemise ja van Leeuweni (de)legitimeerimise strateegiatega osutus viljakaks, et näidata nende tähendusloome suundumuste mitmekesisust, mida ZDS seoses Horvaatia sõjajärgse identiteediga ajendas, ning et tuua välja *võidu ja algupära diskursuse* tähtsus, millesse ZDS on integreeritud. Horvaatia iseseisvussõja narratiiv, nagu ka siin töös mitmel puhul rõhutati, hoiab alal jäika ja ühepoolset narratiivi, mida võimendavad peamiselt poliitikud ja mõned sõjaveteranide organisatsioonid.
4. ZDSi lihtsakoeline tekstuur muudab tema tähistamisvõimekuse hoopis suuremaks: ta on võimeline omandama lisatähendusi, nii et nad saavad vastuoludeta koos eksisteerida. Ometi, kuna ZDSi kasutati konkreetse eesmärgiga kutsuda Iseseisvussõja vältel esile Ustaša pärandit, võimendati selle olemasolevat tähendust fašistliku saluudina.
5. ZDSi veebidünaamika – analüüsituna mõistega enesekirjeldus – näitas, et eriilmelised tekstifragmendid võivad Facebooki kasutajate jaoks moodustada koherentse terviku; samuti võivad nad *teise* välistamise kaudu täita võrgu-

põhise identiteedi loomise funktsioone, vaidlustada või toetada autoriteete ning avalikus diskursuses teatavaid teemasid võimendada.

Käesoleva uurimuse üks peamiseid kitsaskohti seisneb kvalitatiivsete intervjuude puuduses, mida saaks läbi viia gruppide ja indiviididega – näiteks sõjaveteranidega –, keda töös tutvustatakse ja/või analüüsitakse. Sissevaade ZDSiga seotud üksikisikute seletustesse ja vaatenurkadesse tagaks terviklikuma pildi sellise tähendusloome dünaamikast ja tunnusjoontest, mis iseloomustab vaenukõnet ja vaidlustatud sümboleid. Seda konkreetset tahku soovib autor tulevikus uurida, lähtudes tehtud tööst ning 2020. aastal läbi viidud esialgsetest intervjuudest (mille lõpuleviimist takistas Covid-19 pandeemia).

Järgmine potentsiaalne uurimismõõde puudutab hoogu koguvat Iseseisvussõja muraliseerimist, millega tihtipeale ametlikke riiklikke sõjanarratiive võimendatakse. Siin võiks näiteks küsida, kuidas seinamaalingud potentsiaalsete vastupanuallikatena toimivad, kuidas nad taastoodavad välistavaid diskursuseid, millised on nende laiemad kommunikatiivsed funktsioonid konfliktsetes ja konfliktijärgsetes ühiskondades ning millised piirid jooksevad kunsti, vaenukõne ja väljendusvabaduse vahelt.

Küsimus, kuidas aidata kaasa tulevikumõtlemise laadide väljakujunemisele, on iga ühiskonna ääretult tähtis mõõde, eriti sõjapärandite kontekstis, kus identiteedid peaasjalikult (või ainult) mineviku ümber ehituvad. Mis tahes ühiskonna progressiks on esmatähtis edendada tulevikumõtlemist, kujutlust ja avatust erinevusele. Vaidlustatud sümbolid – nagu ZDS – ja sõjanarratiivid etendavad selles protsessis olulist rolli, kuna neid saab kasutada, et ärgitada küsimuste esitamist tähenduste kohta, mis jäävad tihtipeale tähelepanuta, ning et kaaluda stsenaariume selle kohta, milliseks kujuneks ühiskond siis, kui olevikku ei valataks möödaniku vormide põhjal, vaid kui võetaks minevikust õppust, et muuta tulevikku.

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