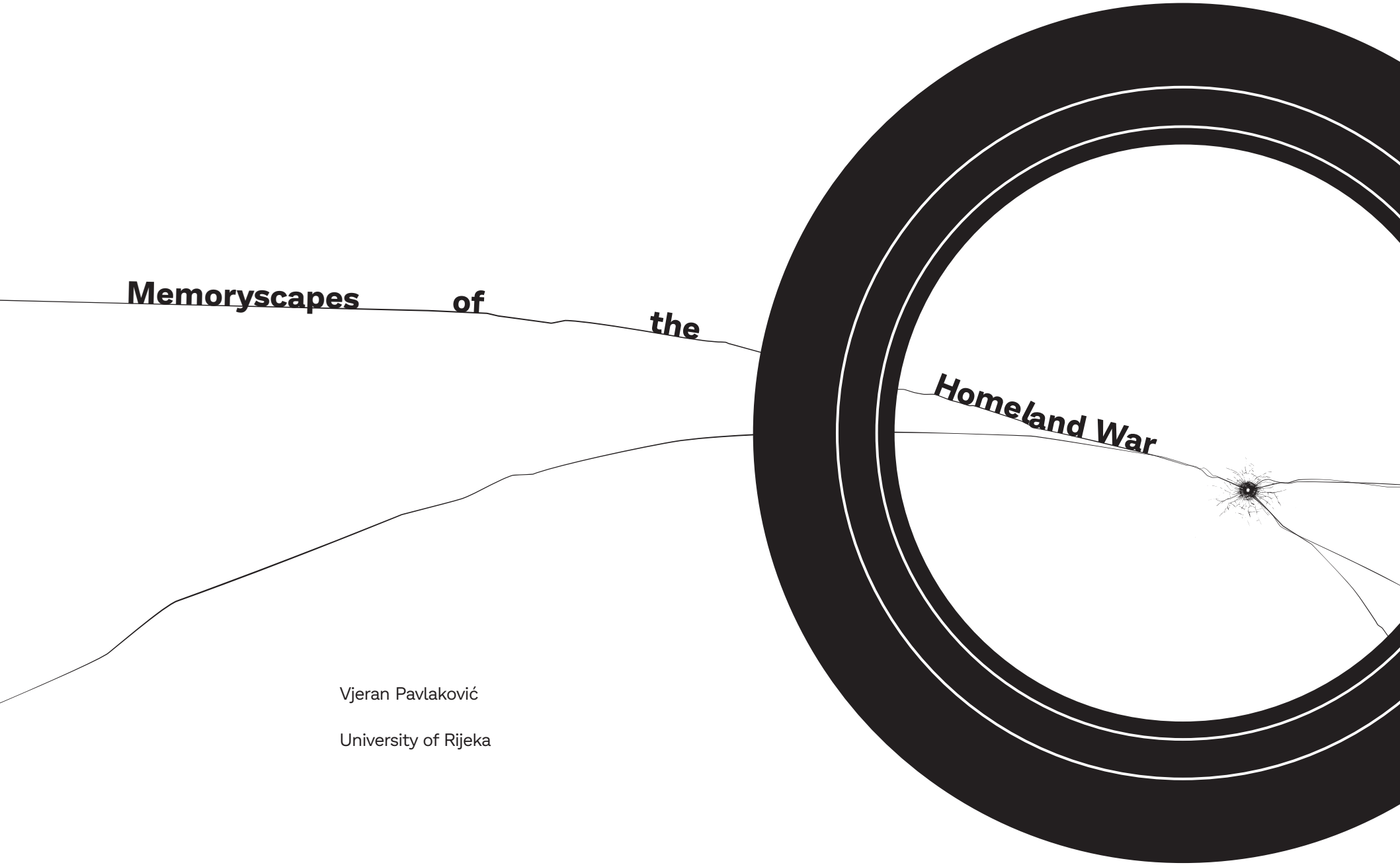
Memoryscapes of the Homeland War



Vjeran Pavlaković

University of Rijeka

Publisher:
Youth Initiative for Human Rights
Eugena Kumičića 8, 10000 Zagreb
www.yihr.hr

On Behalf of the Publisher:
Morana Starčević

Author:
dr. sc. Vjeran Pavlaković

Design:
Slobodna domena Zadruga za otvoreni kod I dizajn
slobodnadomena.hr

Zagreb, March 2022

NED NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY
SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

The development of this publication was financially supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Vjeran Pavlaković's text *Memoryscapes of the Homeland War* appears as a result of Youth Initiative for Human Rights' desire to gain a better insight into the politics of memory related to 1990s post-Yugoslav wars in Croatia and in our effort to share what we discovered with the public. Our focus here was primarily on the building of monuments.

Here are some of the questions this photo-handbook tries to provide answers to: how do sites of memory influence the formation of (national) identity? What is the relation between monuments and social memory? Which actors participate in the formation of collective memory? Do we form it together and is this process an exclusive or an inclusive one? Do monuments contribute to avoiding future wars? What symbols are used in the memorialization of the period in question and what messages do they send? Which monuments fulfill the criteria of effective memorialization?

I believe that *Memoryscapes of the Homeland War* will not only help foster a better understanding of, but also motivate more engagement in shaping the memories of post-Yugoslav wars, memories that do not separate societies and create enmity between them, but bring them together and help make peace.

Finally, a sincere thank you to professor Pavlaković for his cooperation and hard work on *Memoryscapes of the Homeland War.*

On behalf of Youth Initiative for Human Rights

Branka Vierda,
Justice and Reconciliation Program Coordinator

Introduction: From Collective Memory to Memoryscapes

In 2021, the Croatian media was saturated with images and reports on a seemingly endless number of commemorations, celebrations, and political speeches referring to the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), or the Homeland War (Domovinski rat). Politicians crisscrossed the country visiting military and police units, sites of key battles and mass graves, and various memorials dedicated to the conflict that resulted in socialist Yugoslavia's destruction and the emergence of the Republic of Croatia as an independent country. Commemorative practices related to the Homeland War – especially on the major memorial days such as the anniversary of the fall of Vukovar (1991) or Operation Storm (1995) – have always been covered extensively in print and electronic media, as well as frequently provoking political tensions both within the country and with neighboring Yugoslav successor states.[1] **(1)**, **(2)** In the past year, however, the memorialization carried a particular weight, marking thirty years after the outbreak of the war in Croatia and the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution more broadly. Croatian society has experienced nearly three decades of memorialization practices related to the war and is now at a turning point, shifting away from what Jan Assmann refers to as communicative memory, whereby the knowledge about significant events in the past are transmitted by the actual participants of those events, towards a cultural memory, which is institutionalized and a result of top-down strategies implemented by mnemonic actors.[2] Aleida Assmann's concept of "four formats of memory" provides additional insights into the shifting of collective memory over time, particularly the transition from "social memory" to "political memory" that coincides with the mnemonic processes over the past thirty years. She argues that

> individual and social memory cling to and abide with human beings and their embodied interaction; political and cultural memory, on the other hand, are based on the more durable carriers of symbols and material representations. The latter two formats are based on stabilizers of memory that can be passed on from generation to generation, integrating those that have no experiential connection to a historical event via modes of education and organized participation.[3]

While some research into Croatian collective memory has shown that narratives of the recent past are predominantly transmitted via communicative memory within families,[4]

1 For an extensive overview of commemorations and memory politics in Croatia, see Vjeran Pavlaković and Davor Pauković, eds., *Framing the Nation and Collective Identity: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia* (London: Routledge, 2019).

2 Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," in *New German Critique* 65, 1995: 125–133.

3 Aleida Assman, "Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past," in Christian Emden and David Midgley, eds., *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World since 1500* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004): 25.

4 Tanja Vučković Juroš, "Things were good during Tito's times, my parents say: How young Croatian generations negotiated the socially mediated frames of the recent Yugoslav past," in *Memory Studies* 13 (6), 2020: 932-951.

(1) Vukovar (2014)


NOVI LIST

www.novilist.hr

UTEMELJIO FRANO SUPILO 2. SIJEČNJA 1900.

SRIJEDA / RIJEKA / 19. STUDENOGA 2014. / BROJ 21.914 / GODINA LXVIII

CIJENA 7 KUNA

VRIJEME

DANAS max. 15 min. 10

SUTRA max. 16 min. 9

DANAS PRILOG Viktorija

Rijeka obranila naslov, pomorcima ovacije

DIVERZIJA NIJE USPJELA ■ OBILJEŽEN DAN SJEĆANJA NA ŽRTVE VUKOVARA

Dvije kolone prerasle u jednu – veličanstvenu

KOLONU SJEĆANJA

ROŽIDAR KALMETA

Nema svjedoka protiv mene

Str. 5.

POLITIKA I KAZALIŠTE

Frljiću podrška glumaca, HDZ jedini za opoziv

Str. 38. i 39.

MA IH TISUĆU

Hrvatska po broju nedvjeda vrhu EU-a

Str. 20.

Državni čelnici na groblje su ušli mimo ulaza boječi se da bi im stožernici i ekipa Josipa Klemma mogli prepriječiti put. Klemm je to pokušao na križanju Stepinčeve i Bauerove, na kojem je prošle godine državni vrh zaustavljen, ali nije uspio u tome

Str. 2. i 3.

(2) *Novi list* (19 November 2014)

the proliferation of monuments, memorial museums, and other sites of memory demonstrate the need to systematically analyze and investigate the institutionalization of Homeland War memories and its "memoryscape."

Although the cultural or collective memory of a society involves the interplay of both material and nonmaterial elements, from monuments to school curriculums and cultural products, this analysis focuses on the memoryscapes related to the conflict of the 1990s. I consider a memoryscape to encompass the physical manifestations and visual representations of past events in the form of monuments and other memorials, public space, memorial museums, architecture, street names, symbols, and other material traces explicitly recalling a specific historical period. While this is primarily associated with existing objects and sites of memory, a memoryscape of erased and obliterated sites can also exist within archives and in photographs, drawings, films, and other media. While this definition can seem overly broad, especially in cities where the urban environment has functioned as a vast palimpsest of political, ideological, economic, and cultural transformations throughout history, I use the concept to analyze the collection of sites of memory in a particular locality. Historian Pierre Nora developed the concept of a site of memory (*lieu de memoire*) in his work on remembrance in France inspired by the bicentennial of the 1789 Revolution, defining it as an object either "material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community."[5] Jay Winter, a historian of First World War memory, focuses only on material sites for his definition:

> Sites of memory are places where groups of people engage in public activity through which they express a collective shared knowledge . . . of the past, on which a group's sense of unity and individuality is based. The group that goes to such sites inherits earlier meanings attached to the event, as well as adding new meanings. Such activity is crucial to the presentation and preservation of commemorative sites. When such groups disperse or disappear, sites of memory lose their initial force, and may fade away entirely.[6]

5 Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): xvii.

6 Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, eds., *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010): 315.

As Winter notes, sites of memory are intimately tied to identity, and founding events such as Croatia's Homeland War spawn an overabundance of memorial practices that seek to reinforce the hegemonic national narratives and processes of state-building.[7] This dominant narrative depicts the Homeland War as a legitimate, defensive struggle of the Croatian nation against Greater Serbian aggression, often ignoring aspects of the war such as crimes committed by Croatian troops, the collective guilt imposed on all Serbs even though thousands had remained loyal to Zagreb and fought in the Croatian Army, military intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the fact that the conflict had many elements of a civil war during the Yugoslav state's disintegration.[8] Thus a town such as Vukovar has a rich cultural heritage of churches, factories, historic buildings, and archaeological sites constituting a multidimensional memoryscape, but also has a dense Homeland War memoryscape filled with memorial objects specific to the siege of the 1990s that reinforces the dominant war narrative.[9]

James Young, writing on the creation of Holocaust memorials, offers a useful definition for such memorial objects:

> I treat all memory-sites as memorials, the plastic objects within these sites as monuments. A memorial may be a day, conference, or a space, but it need not be a monument. A monument, on the other hand, is always a kind of memorial.[10]

In his work on memorial sites in the United States, Kirk Savage suggests that in modern secular societies monuments are not proper sacred sites, functioning as "pure representation" of the past without "a spiritual trace of a past presence," as in the case of the Lincoln Memorial.[11] Because the Catholic Church is closely tied to commemorative practices of the Homeland War, I would argue that in the Croatian case, monuments and more recently even murals, function as sites of pilgrimage and holy rites that are blessed by a member of the clergy when they are unveiled.[12] Scholars such as David Kertzer, Paul Connerton, and John Gillis have written extensively on the role of commemorations and other political rituals in both premodern and contemporary societies.[13]

There is a wealth of literature dealing with the politics of monuments that is far beyond the scope of this article, from general overviews[14] to interesting case studies from the

7 See Dejan Jović, *Rat i mit: politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2017); and Vjeran Pavlaković, "Fulfilling the Thousand-Year-Old Dream: Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in Croatia," in Pål Kolstø, ed., *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in Southeastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 19-50.

8 This narrative is codified in the Croatian Parliament's Declaration of the Homeland War (*Deklaracija o Domovinskom ratu*), enacted on 13 October 2000. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2000_10_102_1987.html.

9 See for example Mateo Žanić, "Konstrukcija poslijeratnog prostora: simbolička izgradnja Vukovara," in *Polemos*, 11(2), 2008: 29-50, in which he uses the term ethnoscape (*etnokrajolik*) to describe the interventions in public space under both Serbian occupation and then after peaceful reintegration in 1998.

10 James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 4.

11 Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 5.

12 For example, in September 2018, the local pastor blessed a mural to three fallen Croatian soldiers painted on the side of a wall in Brodarica, near Šibenik. https://sibenskiportal.hr/aktualno/foto-na-brodarici-blagoslovljen-mural-posvecen-trojici-branitelja/.

13 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

14 Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage, 1870–1997* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998); Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Derek R. Mallet, *Monumental Conflicts: Twentieth-century Wars and the Evolution of Public Memory* (London: Routledge, 2018).

United States and its Civil War heritage,[15] post-socialist Europe,[16] the former Yugoslavia,[17] and most recently examples from non-Western countries.[18] In addition to the sites of memory themselves, it is important to analyze the mnemonic actors who create, use, and profit from these sites.[19] Even though a memoryscape physically exists in a specific location, it is transmitted through a variety of media and can become transnational, turning into "traveling memory" in the words of Astrid Erll.[20] **(3)**

(3) Vukovar t-shirt souvenir (2021)

15 Dell Upton, *What Can and Can't Be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010); Mitch Landrieu, *In the Shadow of Statues: A White Southerner Confronts History* (New York: Viking Press, 2018); and Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, revised edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

16 Nikolai Vukov and Luca Ponchiroli, *Witnesses of Stone: Monuments and Architectures of the Red Bulgaria, 1944-1989* (Mantova: Ponchiroli Editori, 2011); Viktoriya Hryaban, "Casting Post-socialist Memory: Monuments and Memorials as Instruments of Identity Politics in the Ukraine," in *Etnologia Europa*, 36 (1) 2006: 21-31; and Owen Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

17 Donald Niebyl, *Spomenik Monument Database* (London: Fuel, 2018); Gal Kirn and Robert Burghardt, "Jugoslovenski partizanski spomenici: Između revolucionarne politike i apstraktnog modernizma" in *Jugolink* 2 (1) 2012: 7-20; and Arna Mačkić, *Gradovi smrtnici – zaboravljeni spomenici*, translated by Mirza Purić (Sarajevo: Udruženje Akcija, 2017).

18 Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, Moritz Mihatsch and Michelle Sikes, eds., *The Politics of Historical Memory and Commemoration in Africa* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2022); Obinaa Iroanya, Salomo Ndapulamo, and Gabriella Nguluwe, "Collective Memory and Nation-Building in Africa," in *Africanus: Journal of Development Studies* 50 (1) 2021; Sumit Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia, 1200–2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019); Barry Schwartz, "Culture and collective memory: Comparative perspectives," in Laura Grindstaff, Ming-Cheng M. Lo, and John R. Hall, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2018): 619-628.

19 Michael Bernhard and Jan. Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

20 Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," in *Parallax*, 17 (4) 2011: 11-12.

Faced with the explosive growth not only of scholarship and debates over monuments but the constant creation of new memorial spaces, some scholars have explored the politics of forgetting as a counterpoint to the omnipresent emphasis on remembrance.[21] Others have noted that memory politics have moved beyond physical memoryscapes and exist in the virtual sphere, which allow memory activism to flourish without the same restraints that exist in repressive political systems[22] and raise the question if this will lead to the end of collective memory as we understand it.[23] Finally, monuments and other memorial sites have become the subject of a "dark" or "remembrance" tourism industry, generating money that is at times closely tied to the politics of memory and various mnemonic entrepreneurs.[24]

21 David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Lea David, *The Past Can't Heal Us: The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

22 Orli Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Memory Practices after Conflict: Unwanted Memories* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022, forthcoming).

23 Andrew Hoskins, *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (London: Routledge, 2018).

24 Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone, eds., *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009); and Brigitte Sion, *Death Tourism: Disaster Sites as Recreational Landscape* (London: Seagull Books, 2014).

Memoryscapes: Reconciliation or War by Other Means?

As we have seen, monuments and other sites of memory play important roles in the production of collective remembrance, but it remains to be seen whether memoryscapes can be evaluated as having a positive or negative impact on a society, especially a post-conflict one. Before we turn to a closer analysis of Croatia's memoryscape of the past three decades, it is worth reflecting on the potential of monuments to allow a society to "deal with the past" and "never forget", phrases that are part of the post-Holocaust mnemonic framework. The construction of memorials in public space is a symbolic act, which has the potential to give victims recognition on a much larger scale. This recognition is not just between the victim and the perpetrator as is often the case in exclusively retributive justice, but rather presents the traumatic events of the past to society at large in the hopes of preventing a future reoccurrence. Whether or not public memorials are "visible" or not is another issue which requires further research, but in general the creating of new memorial spaces draws considerable public attention and often controversy. Monuments and other memorial spaces not only offer public recognition to victims for their suffering, but are sites of memory which host commemorative acts or replace actual burial places in the case of soldiers and civilians who were killed abroad or were never found; the cenotaph for the unknown soldier in London and subsequent sites modeled upon it are examples of these kinds of symbolic graves. Andrew Rigby describes "war memorials as foci of grief in the absence of the dead, as public sites to which personal memories can be attached in such a manner that private grieving becomes enmeshed in the collective experience and memory."[25] The question that arises is what kind of collective memory, or narrative, is created, or more specifically, allowed in the public space after the kinds of wars that accompanied Yugoslavia's demise?

Although human history is full of monuments glorifying military victories and honoring commanders, the mass killings due to the increasingly industrialized nature of warfare in the late 19th century (such as the American Civil War) and throughout the twentieth century resulted in a democratization of memorials which were dedicated to common soldiers, and, especially after the horrors of the Holocaust, to civilian victims. Thus, over the course of the past century, war monuments expanded to include many other groups who had often been excluded in official narratives of conflict. In his search for a comprehensive definition for reconciliation, Louis Kriesberg provides four dimensions of

25 Andrew Rigby, *Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence* (London: Lynne Rienner Publ., 2001): 43.

26 Louis Kriesberg, "Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences," *in International Journal of Peace Studies*, 12 (1) 2007: 4-5.

27 Ibid.: 7.

28 Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

29 Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Franck, *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement: Design, Use and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2016).

that elusive concept: truth (recognition of the crimes committed against a group), justice (either retributive or restorative), respect towards the formerly demonized opponent, and security to enable the former antagonists to live together without threatening each other.[26] Memorials to victims have the potential to explicitly address two of these elements; truth, and respect for the former enemy.

However, it is rare to find post-conflict societies willing to build memorials to former enemies perceived as aggressors, invaders, or perpetrators of mass atrocities, especially in the case of civil wars or the kind of interethnic violence experienced in the former Yugoslavia. Kriesberg offers a somewhat idealistic solution when "one side may have more to atone for and the other more to forgive," suggesting that

> symmetry may be expressed in symbolic ways, and in constructing those ways fosters mutual respect. In the aftermath of civil wars, monuments and memorials may be constructed, after extended negotiations, which give space to both sides in the past struggle.[27]

Unfortunately, there are few cases in which all victims are recognized, especially since there are numerous mnemonic actors besides government officials and institutions – such as victims' groups, veterans' organizations, or the dominant religious community – seeking to commemorate the losses of only certain groups. This results in not only limited representation in the memorial landscape, but the emergence of a one-sided narrative of victimization even if there were civilian victims on multiple sides of the conflict. Marc Howard Ross, working on Northern Ireland and Catalonia, thus poses the question whether "cultural expressions" (including monuments, parades, religious practices, flags, language, and other symbolic displays) can function as "exacerbaters or inhibiters of conflict."[28] According to him, despite many challenges there is nevertheless the potential to use memoryscapes for community-building in post-conflict societies, which is also emphasized in a handbook of how to turn sites of memory into "spaces of engagement."[29]

The Slovenian government commissioned a 1.2 million euro "Monument to the Victims of All Wars" that was unveiled in 2017, consisting of two blank walls; in other words, trying

(4) Ljubljana (2020)

to encompass all of the political and ideological divisions in society by addressing none of them directly. **(4)** The US city of Richmond, Virginia, which carries heavy historical burdens as a former slave trading hub, the capital of the Confederacy, and formerly home to numerous Confederate monuments, erected an innovative “Reconciliation Monument” in 2007 that educates visitors about the legacy of slavery. **(5)** Moreover, replicas of this same monument were erected in Liverpool in the United Kingdom and in Benin, which the designers refer to as the “Reconciliation Triangle” in order to highlight the international dimension of the slave trade. The text on the monument reads “Acknowledge and forgive the past. Embrace the present. Shape a future of reconciliation and justice.” Although far from a true reconciliation memorial, the monument in Kozarica near Novska lists fallen soldiers and civilian victims from all sides in the Second World War, post-war period, and the Homeland War, albeit with little aesthetic sensibility. **(6)** Any effort to draw upon the reconciliatory power of memorial spaces, however, requires the precondition for open dialogue, discussion, and debate in the creation (or removal) of sites of memory, which has not been the case in Croatia throughout the 20th century.

(5) Richmond, Virgina (2019)

(6) Kozarica (2014)

Memoryscapes of the Homeland War

Before we turn to a typology of monuments and other memory sites related to the Homeland War, it is important to also reflect on the legacy of the extensive memoryscape created after the Second World War. During socialist Yugoslavia, thousands of memorials celebrating the Partisan resistance movement (*borci*) and commemorating civilian victims (*žrtve fašističkog terora*) were erected in Croatia and the other republics, in addition to monuments dedicated to various aspects of the revolution.[30] Symbols of monarchist Yugoslavia or the fascist occupiers were removed, as were other monuments deemed to be counter-revolutionary, such as the statue of Ban Josip Jelačić in Zagreb's main square. After the war broke out in Slovenia and then in Croatia in 1991, this memoryscape dedicated to the communist narrative became not only a collateral victim of the fighting, but was systematically destroyed, removed, defaced, damaged, or even repurposed into nationalized sites of memory.[31]

According to statistics published by Croatia's Association of Antifascist Fighters (SABH - *Savez antifasistickih boraca Hrvatske*), nearly 3,000 monuments and memorial plaques were destroyed or severely damaged between 1990 and 2000.[32] An analysis of their data indicates that the most targeted memorials included those that commemorated Serb and Jewish victims of fascism, emphasized the role of the Communist Party in the resistance movement, prominently featured red stars or the Cyrillic script, and highlighted brotherhood and unity. As one memoryscape was violently erased – rarely with proper legal justification and certainly never with an open or democratic discussion – another one was created, often next to or even on top of the rubble of the suddenly negative heritage of socialism. Sometimes the new Homeland War monuments were incorporated elegantly into pre-existing Partisan memorial spaces, such as in Zaton, suggesting a continuity of antifascist ideas. **(7)** However, since 1990 there was a flurry of monument-building related to the defeated side in the Second World War, but without a critical distancing from the crimes of the collaborationist regimes. These newly created monuments tended to portray collaborators exclusively as victims of communist terror and not fallen soldiers aligned with the Axis powers. The organization Hrvatski Domobran erected hundreds of monuments and memorial plaques to the Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), often with problematic texts that seek to rehabilitate the Ustaša movement and distort the truth about the Second World War rather than honor the fallen with a dignified memory site.[33] Some of these monuments

30 Heike Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu – okamenjeno sećanje*? translated by Aleksandra Kostić (Belgrade: XX vek, 2014); and Sanja Horvatinčić, "Monument, Territory, and the Mediation of War Memory in Socialist Yugoslavia," in *Život umjetnosti* 96 (2015): 34-69.

31 Vjeran Pavlaković, "Contested Histories and Monumental Pasts: Croatia's Culture of Remembrance," in Daniel Brumund and Christian Pfeifer, eds., *Monumenti: Changing Face of Remembrance* (Belgrade: Forum ZFD, 2012); and Gal Kirn, "A Few Critical Notes on the Destiny of the Yugoslav Modernist Partisan Memorial Sites in the Contemporary, Post-Yugoslav (Croatian) Context," in Nataša Ivančević, ed., *Vojin Bakić: Lightening Forms – A Retrospective* (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013): 273-293.

32 Juraj Hrženjak, ed., *Rušenje antifašističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj, 1990-2000* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca hrvatske, 2002): xii.

33 According to a monograph published by Hrvatski Domobran, between 1990 and 2005 the organization erected over 200 monuments and plaques throughout Croatia in honor of Ustaša and Domobran soldiers. Zvonimir Bakša, ed., *Spomen - obilježja: podignuta u čast i slavu poginulim i ubijenim pripadnicima hrvatskih oružanih snaga i civilima žrtvama II. svjetskog rata, poraća i zajedničkih spomen-obilježja s poginulim u Domovinskom ratu u 1991.-1995. g.* (Zagreb: Udruga ratnih veterana Hrvatski domobran, 2006): 71-76.

(7) Zaton (2012)

combined fallen soldiers from the Homeland War with NDH soldiers and victims of communist repression, blurring the two conflicts and seeking to tie the modern Croatian state with the failed Ustaša state. **(8) (9)** A similar rehabilitation and memorialization of local pro-fascist forces can be observed throughout the Yugoslav successor states since the 1990s, with varying degrees of obliteration of the socialist monumental heritage.

(8) Belaj (2013)

(9) Marino Selo (2014)

34 Za dom spremni was the official salute of the pro-fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH – Nezavisna Država Hrvatske, 1941-1945), which committed numerous crimes against humanity and instituted genocidal policies against Serbs, Jews, and Roma, including concentration camps such as Jasenovac. For a detailed analysis of the HOS plaque, see Katarina Damčević "Cultural texts, enemies, and taboos: autocommunicative meaning-making surrounding the "Ready for the Homeland" Ustaša salute in Croatia," in *Social Semiotics*, 2021 DOI: 10.1080/10350330.2021.1883404.

(10) Jasenovac (2016)

As in the case of many post-war states, the first years of monument building in newly independent Croatia were chaotic and unregulated, with a variety of official and unofficial actors competing to fill the public space with monuments, memorial plaques, and other sites of memory which included problematic symbols, provocative language, and questionable aesthetic qualities. As mentioned in the introduction, thirty years after the beginning of the Homeland War it is possible to see the shift from social or communicative memory towards political memory, in other words the institutionalization of remembrance practices. At present, the building of monuments is regulated and under the control of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs. However, the guidelines for the content and language used on monuments remains ambiguous and open to local interpretation. In 2016 a controversy erupted over a memorial plaque for fallen members of the paramilitary Croatian Defense Forces (HOS – *Hrvatske obrambene snage*) that included the Ustaša slogan "Ready for the Homeland" (ZDS - *Za dom spremni*).[34] Particularly problematic was the location of the plaque, near the Jasenovac Concentration Camp memorial site, which prompted the government to form a Commission for Dealing with Totalitarian Symbols (also known as the Council for Dealing with the Legacy of Undemocratic Regimes) on 8 December 2016. Even though the plaque was moved to the location of another monument near Novska, public debate continued over fascist symbols, appropriated and used during the Homeland War, and their presence in public space. **(10)(11)**

(11) Trokut (Novska) (2021)

The members of the commission were divided on the legality and use of Ustaša symbols in the final document (*Dokument dijaloga*) published on 28 February 2018, resulting in extensive public criticism that the commission's report ultimately did not lead to any specific regulations regarding controversial symbols. However, no official monuments have included ZDS since the commission's conclusions.[35] In recent years there has been a great awareness of how sites of memory play important roles in society beyond the immediate impact for the mnemonic entrepreneurs who build them, from the media to NGOs and other social actors. Even leading politicians, such as Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, use phrases that were previously in the exclusive domain of memory scholars. On many occasions he has promised that his government will "nurture a culture of memory" (*njegovanje kulture sjećanja*) as if it was an exclusively top-down process.[36]

The exact number of monuments and memorial plaques dedicated to the Homeland War is unknown, not only because of a lack of a central database but because new memorials are erected on a weekly basis. In 2016, researchers from the Association of Social Research and Communication (UDIK) sent out questionnaires to 557 Croatian cities, municipalities, and veteran organizations to voluntarily provide information on local Homeland War memorials, the results of which were published in the book *In Memoriam Republika Hrvatska*, Vol. 1 (2017).[37] A total of 337 (60%) of the questionnaires were returned with responses, and additional research resulted in information on the memorials in 443 (80%) cities and municipalities, out of which 97 did not have a single Homeland War monument. Even though numerous monuments and other memorial sites were built since the data was collected in 2016, the information on monuments allows us to reflect on some preliminary characteristics of the Homeland War memoryscape. The researchers were able to collect information on approximately 1,200 monuments (compared to 2,000 monuments they researched in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The data reveals that the erecting of memorials is both a bottom-up and top-down process. Initiatives of local administrations, fellow veterans of fallen soldiers, or victims' families are often crucial in building memorials in the early post-war years, while more ambitious and state-sponsored memorials were built for years, even for decades after the conflict ended. A similar pattern could be observed during the socialist period.

35 Dokument Dijaloga, 28 February 2018, https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Vijesti/2018/02%20velja%C4%8Da/28%20velja%C4%8De/Dokument%20dijaloga.pdf. See also Hrvoje Cvitanović, "On Memory Politics and Memory Wars: A Critical Analysis of the Croatian Dialogue Document," in *Politička misao*, 55 (4), 2018: 109-146.

36 Prime Minister Plenković frequently uses the phrase at commemorations such as Jasenovac in April 2020 (https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/jasna-osuda-zlocina-pijetet-prema-zrtvama-njegovanje-kulture-sjecanja-i-predani-rad-na-toleranciji-u-drustvu-29288/29288) and Goli Otok in August 2020 (https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/premijer-na-golom-otoku-vazno-je-njegovati-kulturu-sjecanja-bez-istine-nema-pomirbe-niti-postovanja-prema-zrtvama/30191), as well as numerous other occasions.

37 *In Memoriam Republika Hrvatska*, vol. 1 (Sarajevo: UDIK, 2017).

Not surprisingly, the counties (*županije*) with the most monuments were those on the frontlines during the war or under occupation: Vukovar-Srijem County (109), Sisak-Moslavina County (100), and Osijek-Baranja County (86). The counties with the fewest monuments – Krapina-Zagorje County (11), Istria County (11), and Varaždin County (30) – were located far from the war zones, even though soldiers from these regions volunteered or were mobilized in large numbers. The greatest number of monuments in this research, 924 or over 75%, were dedicated exclusively to soldiers, 250 were dedicated to both soldiers and civilians, while only 38 were for exclusively civilian victims. This number has certainly changed in the years since the survey was conducted, although the predominance of military memorials is unlikely to have changed much.[38] The largest number of monuments are dedicated to Croats (94.46%), while 3.47% of the analyzed monuments include two or more ethnic groups, 1.24% are dedicated to Serbs, 0.50% to Bosniaks, and 0.33% to foreigners. Building monuments for those on the "other side" has been one of the most controversial themes related to memory politics of the Homeland War, since the permanence and symbolic power of a physical memorial is much stronger than a commemoration, performance, or other form of remembrance. Several monuments to Croatian Serbs have been vandalized, destroyed, or prevented from being built, and particularly sensitive sites such as Vukovar have essentially banned the erection of any memorials that would suggest Serb civilians were also killed during the war. Some of the specifics on controversial monuments will be discussed in detail below. The newest trend in memorialization moves beyond three dimensional statues and other monuments, appropriating the subversive media of murals and graffiti that sidestep building regulations and bans on controversial symbols. **(12) (13)** While street art and murals offer the potential to engage transnational artists to bring color and positive images to war-torn cities, such as the VukovArt project in Vukovar, there has also been a noticeable increase in the militarization of murals, including the celebration of war criminals throughout the region.[39]

38 Although the final war losses are still being calculated by both state-funded institutions and NGOs, available data suggests the Croatian side suffered 8,257 (60%) military and 5,657 (40%) civilian deaths, while an estimated 7,204 lives were lost on the Serb side (both Republika Srpska Krajina and Yugoslav People's Army), along with over 1,800 still missing or unidentified persons on both sides. See https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/hrvatska-ljutski-gubici/28976312.html.

39 Dragan Grozdanić, "Zidovi srama," *Novosti*, 17 September 2021, https://www.portalnovosti.com/zidovi-srama.

(12) Crikvenica (2021)

(13) Split (2021)

Towards a Typology of Homeland War Monuments

Sandra Križić Roban's 2010 article "Vrijeme spomenika" ("Time of the monuments") serves as an appropriate starting point for an analysis of the Homeland War memoryscape three decades in the making. She notes that the most common type of memorial includes a cross or crucifix, as well as the red and white checkerboard coat of arms (*šahovnica*), which is artistically incorporated into the design of the monument or sometimes just simply engraved next to the text of the memorial.[40] Another common symbol found on monuments is the *pleter*, or Croatian interlace. All of these can be found on one of the most iconic monuments of the war, the Vukovar cross on the banks of the Danube, erected in 1998.[41] **(14)**

In order to evaluate individual case studies, we can use the three categories identified by Nora for the *lieux de memoire* and observe the material, symbolic, and functional characteristics of each monument.[42] A monument's materiality is the most easily observable characteristic, from the actual elements used in its construction and its aesthetic qualities to its location. Although there are an increasing number of monuments that are figurative (statues or busts of soldiers, occasionally civilian figures), the majority are abstract or based on the shape of a cross, *šahovnica*, or *pleter*. While Croatian monuments are broadly similar in design to those in neighboring Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, albeit with different symbols and discursive styles, the memoryscape in Kosovo features a much greater number of figurative monuments. **(15)** The nearly one hundred statues and busts of Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's wartime president, are exceptions to the generally abstract trends in Homeland War monuments, albeit with varying degrees of artistic success.[43] **(16) (17) (18)** In his discussion of the artistry of abstract memorials versus figurative monuments, James Young concludes that "figurative imagery seemed best to naturalize the state's memorial messages."[44] This struggle between the two approaches is best illustrated in Maya Lin's "antimonument" design for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., which had to be modified with the addition of a figurative monument of three soldiers after pressure from critics of her abstract concept set into the landscape of the National Mall.[45] Other forms of memorial objects include commemorative plaques, military vehicles transformed into monuments (tanks, tractors, and even boats), chapels, museums, memorial rooms, street names, sports fields, and most recently murals and graffiti that function as memorials. Monuments are most often located in central public spaces such as parks, in front of

40 Sandra Križić Roban, "Vrijeme spomenika. Skulpturalni, arhitektonski, urbanistički i drugi načini obilježavanja Domovinskog rata," in *Radovi Instituta povijest umjetnosti* 34 (2010): 227.

41 The same sculptor created a copy of the Vukovar cross for the Church of Croatian Martyrs in Udbina, signfying a continuity of martyrdom for the Croatian state lasting centuries including the Battle of Vukovar.

42 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," in *Representations* 26 (1989): 18-19.

43 *Jutarnji list*, 25 November 2018, https://www.jutarnji.hr/magazini/svi-spomenici-tudmanu-podignuto-ih-je-mnogo-a-struka-se-nije-jednom-zgrazala-nad-diletantizmom-tih-djela-i-neodgovornosti-prema-javnom-prostoru-8093534.

44 Young, *Texture of Memory*: 10.

45 Savage, *Monument Wars*: 267-277.

(14) Vukovar (2018)

(15) Prishtina (2018)

(16) Pridraga (2021)

(17) Nova Gradiška (2021)

(18) Kaštel (2021)

administrative buildings, schools or churches, alongside roads, or at sites where specific events took place (a battle, ambush, exchange of prisoners, execution, mobilization, or other war-related meeting). However, many monuments are located in places with restricted access, such as cemeteries, on private property, within religious complexes, built into memorial rooms and museums, or hidden behind the walls of army bases and police stations.

The symbolic characteristics of a monument or site of memory are not just the predominant symbols that can be found on the surface (for example, the red stars frequently seen on Partisan memorials or the above mentioned Croatian national symbols on the monuments from the Homeland War), but also the texts and messages that the monument sends to those who interact with it. Ethnographers Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin and Reana Senjković had already begun analyzing the new symbolic landscape of post-socialist Croatia in the early 1990s, and their work remains fundamental reading for deciphering the visual semiotics of the new state.[46] Texts on monuments are often formulated in a neutral bureaucratic language or contain excerpts of poems or literature, but can also be reconciliatory or provocative, especially if accompanied by phrases or symbols that spark debates, controversies, and even protests. The dates a monument bears are noteworthy, whether they reflect the official years of the Homeland War (1991-1995) or refer to a specific event.[47] Monuments often provide information of their own biographies (when they were erected, who initiated their creation, the name of the author, the company that carried out the construction), but others require additional research to discovery key details about their history.

Finally, the functionality of a monument – what kind of commemorations take place there, is it visited frequently or just once a year, does it serve to mobilize a certain political party or does it attract a broad range of ideological actors – is a characteristic that requires a long-term analysis of a site of memory, and is not the focus of this article. Nevertheless, some monuments are known more for the mnemonic actors that use them than the monuments themselves, or in the case of some Croatian Serb civilian victims, no monument exists although commemorative events take place at these informal sites.

Even before the war ended, various memorial objects had been erected throughout Croatia to preserve local memories, honor fallen soldiers, and grieve for civilian victims.

46 Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, "O konstrukciji tradicije u naše dane: Rituali, simboli i konotacije vremena." *Narodna umjetnost* 29 (1) 1992: 25-42; Reana Senjković, "The Use, Interpretation and Symbolization of the National: Croatia 1990/1992. *Ethnologia Europaea* 25 (1) 1995: 69-79; and Reana Senjković, "Ideologies and Iconographies: Croatia in the Second Half of the 20th Century," in *Collegium Antropologium* 19 (1) 1995: 53-62.

47 While nearly every Croatian monument lists the dates of the Homeland War as lasting from 1991-1995, monuments in Serbia list 17 August 1990 as the beginning of the conflict. The Declaration of the Homeland War (https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2000_10_102_1987.html), enacted by the Sabor (parliament) in 2000 lists the dates of the conflict as 1991-1995, while the Law on Croatian Defenders of the Homeland War (https://www.zakon.hr/z/973/Zakon-o-hrvatskim-braniteljima-iz-Domovinskog-rata-i-%C4%8Dlanovima-njihovih-obitelji-) revised in 2021, recognizes veteran status of those active from 5 August 1990 until 30 June 1996. Whereas the English-language Wikipedia page on the Homeland War gives the precise dates of the war as lasting from 31 March 1991 until 12 November 1995 (from the Bloody Easter at the Plitvice Lakes until the Erdut Agreement), the Croatian version offers a variety of possible dates stretching from 1990 until the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia in 1998. Football ultras even cite the never-finished match between Dinamo Zagreb and Belgrade's Crvena Zvezda (and subsequent riot) on 5 May 1990 as the start of the war. See Dario Brentin, "Ambassadors of memory: "honoring the Homeland War" in Croatian sport," in Vjeran Pavlaković and Davor Pauković, eds., *Framing the Nation and Collective Identity: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia* (London: Routledge, 2019): 160-176.

48 Some of the soldiers appear to be wearing *šahovnicas* in the style found on Herceg-Bosna flags and HVO units, while one even seems to have a German-style helmet from the Second World War.

49 Križić Roban, "Vrijeme spomenika": 225-226.

50 Ibid.: 226.

51 David Kabalin, interview with author, 10 March 2016, Zagreb.

(19) Maksimir (Zagreb) (2012/2021)

For example, a large monument depicting Croatian soldiers marching into battle was erected in front of Zagreb's Maksimir Stadium in 1994 on the anniversary of the infamous Dinamo-Crvena Zvezda match, one year before the Croatian Army actually launched large scale military operations to liberate occupied territory.[48] **(19)** As was the case in socialist Yugoslavia immediately after the end of the Second World War, when Partisan monuments and memorial plaques sprang up in an unregulated fashion and on local initiatives without clear guidelines, memorialization of the Homeland War was not initially a top-down process driven by the state, but a grass-roots phenomenon driven by a wide variety of stakeholders – associations for veterans of various military and police units, families of victims, municipal-level politicians, local clergy, and other organizations. This monument boom has continued to the present, and the memoryscape is full of all kinds of memorial objects which vary from aesthetically problematic kitsch to monumental abstract constructions which seem to pay homage to their socialist modernist predecessors. According to Križić Roban, this intense monumentalization "strongly suggests the trend of preserving the exhausted modernist concept" which has resulted in numerous memorials that fail to interact with their surroundings or to the citizens with whom they are intended to communicate.[49] This spontaneous eruption of monuments meant that the majority were built without public tenders and without consulting art historians or architects, resulting in many questionable interventions into public space.[50] Architect David Kabalin, who has worked on several monument projects in Croatia, strongly believes that "aesthetics and quality are crucial for every intervention in public space, and especially for monuments due to their significance for the community and symbolic importance these places hold."[51] Not only is the quality of the memorials problematic, but the texts accompanying them do not always follow the official narrative of the war, sometimes containing inaccurate information or extremist language which makes no attempt at reconciling with the former enemies. Furthermore, the overwhelming focus on military operations and victimization in the *memoryscape* leaves little space for memorials dedicated to peace initiatives, such as the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, which deserve greater emphasis in the country's memory politics if future generations are expected to value negotiations and dialogue in resolving conflicts.

As mentioned above, the Catholic cross and *šahovnica* are the most common symbols on Homeland War monuments, just as the red star and hammer and sickle were featured on

(20) Slunj (2007)

most Partisan monuments. For some monuments, as in Vukovar, the entire monument is the form of a crucifix. The monument in Slunj's central park **(20)** is another prime example of this use of the cross and *šahovnica*, clearly demarcating the current ethnic majority in a town that was occupied during the war. The memorial to soldiers killed during Operation Maslenica (1993) located in Kašić near Zadar is also dominated by a large cross. **(21)** Since the majority of the casualties were from the Slavonian 3rd Guards Brigade "Kuna", the cross is made from Slavonian oak and sits on top of Dalmatian stone that composes the remainder of the monument in order to symbolize the connection between these two very different Croatian regions. Other memorials incorporate a cross stylistically into the monument plastic, such as the damaged and bullet-riddled monument in Nuštar **(22)**, the large fountain in Pakrac's central square **(23)**, or the wooden memorial drawing upon local cultural heritage in Ernestinovo. **(24)**

(21) Maslenica (Kašić) (2010)

(22) Nuštar (2021)

(23) Pakrac (2021)

(24) Ernestinovo (2021)

These examples show that even though most monuments share the same symbols, the form of the monuments take on a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and materials. In contrast, Slovenian monuments commemorating their 10-day independence struggle are often in the shape of the concrete pyramids used as anti-tank barriers, signifying the battles for the borders and stopping the armored units of the Yugoslav People's Army. **(25) (26)** However, for marking sites of mass graves Croatia has a standard monument form. The Croatian government's first efforts to regulate memorials came in 1996, with the law on marking sites of mass graves of the victims of the Homeland War.[52] At the sites of the identified mass graves, i.e., graves containing three or more victims, the state financed the erection of an identical black obelisk with the image of a dove designed by sculptor Slavomir Drinković, the first of which was erected at the Ovčara mass grave near Vukovar in 1998. **(27)** As of November 2019, eighty-one such monuments were built throughout Croatia, commemorating a total of 150 mass graves (graves in the vicinity of one another are marked by a single obelisk). These exclusively mark sites for victims of "Greater Serbian aggression." **(28)**

52 *Narodne novine* 79/96, 21 November 1996, http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1996_11_100_1963.html (accessed 4 March 2016).

(25) Vrhnika (2021)

(26) Kojsko (2021)

(27) Ovčara (2018)

(28) Saborsko (2020)

(29) Sisak (2009)

Although the cross motif dominates many of the memorials, some towns have erected monuments that incorporate more artistic solutions in their design. Sisak's central Homeland War memorial, in the shape of a scroll with the names of 233 fallen soldiers next to an eternal flame, was designed by sculptor Peruško Bogdanović and erected in 1999. **(29)** The monument to fallen soldiers in Slavonski Brod, from 2004, combines a figurative depiction of a mother and small child with a large obelisk topped with a stylized *šahovnica*. **(30)** Nova Gradiška's Homeland War monument, erected in 2006, combines a surrealist figure of a gigantic fallen warrior on top of a fountain inscribed with the names of soldiers killed on the nearby battlefields. **(31)** Dubrovnik's ambitious Homeland War monument, erected in 2007 near the Pile Gate, included video images of the sea, but over the years it was heavily criticized by citizens and veteran groups, and finally after years of neglect was removed by the city authorities in 2020. **(32)** In 2011, Otočac unveiled its central Homeland War monument, a white obelisk split by a stylized cross that nevertheless has design elements alluding to socialist modernist abstract memorial spaces. **(33)**

(30) Slavonski Brod (2021)

(31) Nova Gradiška (2021)

(32) Dubrovnik (2013)

(33) Otočac (2012)

53 In May 2020 several veterans wore shirts with the ZDS emblem during the commemoration, prompting President Zoran Milanović to leave in the middle of the ceremony. *Balkan Insight*, 5 May 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/05/croatian-presidents-reluctant-struggle-against-fascist-symbols/.

54 According to *Novi list*, one year after the monument was unveiled, the government had failed to secure enough funds and still owed 2.5 million kuna to the construction company that erected the memorial, perhaps one of the reasons the monument itself was designed to accept donations. *Novi list*, 21 June 2012, "Nacionalna svetinja pretvorena u veliku nacionalnu sramotu": 8.

55 https://www.mreza-mira.net/vijesti/razno/zatajena-zrtva-gorana-alavanje/.

(34) Okučani (2021)

While many cities and municipalities have monuments dedicated to local fallen soldiers and civilians, certain cities have memorial spaces dedicated to important military actions, operations, and events. The center of Okučani in Western Slavonia is dominated by a large memorial space consisting of 51 cubes made of highly polished reflective material representing fallen soldiers in Operation Flash (*Bljesak*, 1995) titled "Crystal Cubes of Serenity" (*Kristalne kocke vedrine*). Unveiled in 2018, the 2.8 million kuna monument by sculptor Dalibor Stošić and designer Hrvoje Bilandžić functions as the central commemorative space for the anniversary of Operation Flash every year on 1 May and has seen several scandals and provocations involving ZDS and Croatian politicians.[53] **(34)** An even larger memorial space dedicated to Operation Storm (*Oluja*, 1995) occupies Knin's central square. The original monument in Knin consisted of a bronze Croatian soldier wielding an automatic rifle and flashing a victory sign. **(35)** In 2011, the soldier monument was removed and the entire square was redesigned. A new 7.9 million kuna memorial by sculptor Petar Dolić and architect Tonko Zaninović was erected in the shape of a victory arch with a stylized "V" obelisk in front, creating the central space for commemorative speeches and official wreath-laying during the 5 August anniversaries. **(36)** The monument transmits the dominant narrative of the Homeland War more explicitly than any other physical memorial: a video screen built into the victory arch shows a short documentary about the war, and there is a slot where inserted coins illuminate panels representing candles.[54] **(37)** Plaques installed throughout the square provide information on the numbers of fallen soldiers, civilian victims, internment camps, mass graves, and other war-related data, but only of the Croatian side. In the Plitvice National Park, a modest monument was erected for Josip Jović, a police officer killed during the so-called "Bloody Easter" events on 31 March 1991. **(38)** The text on the monument reads "The First Fallen Defender of the Republic of Croatia" (*Prvi poginuli branitelj Republike Hrvatske*), even though the first person killed while on duty in a Croatian uniform was Goran Alavanja, a police officer shot by rebel Krajina militants on 23 November 1990 near Benkovac.[55] Even though Alavanja is in the registry of veterans, Jović is considered the first victim of the war due to the fact that Alavanja was an ethnic Serb, an awkward fact in the narrative of Serb aggression and Croatian victimhood as memorialized on the monument near the Plitvice Lakes.

(35) Knin (2007)

(36) Knin (2014)

(37) Knin (2014)

(38) Plitvice (2008)

(39) Borovo (2018)

(40) Borovo (2018)

Unlike in Bosnia and Hercegovina, where veterans from all three warring sides erected memorials for fallen soldiers (in Brčko, Serb, Croat, and Bosniak memorials are even relatively close to each other), military monuments in Croatia are almost exclusively for the Croatian side. In the cemetery of Borovo there is a monument with the names of fallen Serb soldiers (next to a small plaque dedicated to "Krajina Heroes" by the paramilitary group Beli Orlovi), **(39)** along with a mausoleum for military commander Vukašin Šoškoćanin. **(40)** The monument in the tiny hamlet of Varivode was the first official memorial to Serb civilian victims, erected after a vandal smashed the first memorial, a simple wooden cross, in April 2010. The unveiling ceremony received considerable attention because of the presence of former President Ivo Josipović, an honorary guard from the Croatian Army, and hundreds of people, including journalists and other politicians. **(41)** Although this seemed to indicate a shift in opening up the Croatian memoryscape to other casualties, the number of monuments to Croatian Serbs remains minimal. An attempt to include two soldiers on a monument in Golubić near Knin resulted in protests from Croatian veteran groups, forcing the initiators of the monument to remove the list of names and replace it with an inscription commemorating "victims of war." **(42)** Similar vague references to "victims of war," which presumably include both soldiers and civilian victims, can be found in Serb majority municipalities such as Mokro Polje (Dalmatia), **(43)** Bobota (Eastern Slavonia), **(44)** and Bršadin (Eastern Slavonia). **(45)** On a number of occasions Croatian veteran organizations have blocked the creation of new monuments (such as in Žirovac near Dvor), and as yet no memorials have been dedicated specifically to ethnic Serbs who served in the Croatian military. Vandals have defaced memorials in Eastern Slavonia, and nationalists have publicly called for the destruction of "Chetnik" monuments on social media, resulting in an attack on the monument in Medare (Western Slavonia), **(46)** a simple Orthodox cross with just the dates 1991-1995 (a similar monument is located near the Orthodox Church in Okučane). **(47)** Newer monuments dedicated to Croatian Serb civilian victims, such as in Gošić (see below) and Uzdolje **(48)**, list the names and other information about the crimes that transpired. Although the erection of a memorial cross in the village of Grubori in August 2020 was attended by Croatian President Zoran Milanović, Minister of Veteran Affairs Tomo Medved, and Deputy Prime Minister Boris Milošević, signaling a positive shift in Croatia's commemorative practices, many war crimes against Serb civilians, such as in Paulin Dvor, Gospić, Sisak, and Vukovar, have yet to be memorialized. The central

(41) Varivode (2010)

(42) Golubić (2012)

(43) Mokro Polje (2016)

(44) Bobota (2016)

(45) Brdašin (2021)

(46) Medare (2021)

(47) Okučane (2021)

(48) Uzdolje (2020)

monument for Bosniaks who fought in the Homeland War is located in front of Zagreb's mosque, although questions have been raised about the claim that almost 25,000 Bosniaks were in Croatian military units, of which 1,000 allegedly lost their lives.[55] **(49)** The text on Pula's central Homeland War monument is in both Croatian and Italian as regulated by the minority language law, but a glance at the names of the fallen soldiers reveals Istria's demographic changes since the Second World War; instead of Italians, we can see Bosniaks, Albanians, and other ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia that had migrated in the post-war era. **(50)** The use of minority languages is also visible on a memorial plaque in Bilje, in Baranja, which lists the fallen soldiers in both Croatian and Hungarian. **(51)**

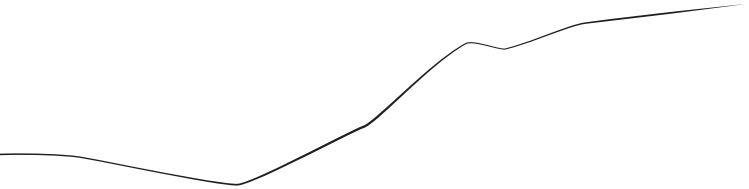
56 Filip Škiljan, *Sjećanja Bošnjaka na sudjelovanje u Domovinskom ratu u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Vijeće bošnjačke nacionalne manjine Grada Zagreba, 2021).

(49) Zagreb (2014)

(50) Pula (2017)

(51) Bilje (2021)

CONCLUSION



Some of the key questions facing Croatian society as it moves forward after thirty years of Homeland War memory politics include what are the best practices for memorializing the traumatic past and how to implement them in the memoryscape? Even trying to identify what these best practices could be is challenging, since there would certainly be a variety of answers from art historians, architects, sociologists, psychologists, activists, victims' organizations, and numerous other interest groups and scholarly disciplines. There is also the danger of imposing an international or universal model on the specific conditions in any country or region, even though the experiences from other post-conflict situations are crucial in understanding one's own approach to dealing with the past. Croatia's memorialization practices so far have unfortunately been enacted with little or no public discussion about what memory objects will be built in local communities, resulting in memory spaces that do not encourage discussion but instead impose a hegemonic nationalist narrative that reflects the ideological profile of the political class in power since the end of the war. The creation of an accessible online database and interactive map that can function as a research tool would allow scholars as well as other social actors in Croatia to have a better idea of the existing memoryscape and assist in planning for future memorialization projects. Considerable work remains to be done in analyzing how local communities perceive existing sites of memory, examining how monuments contribute to the creation of (local, regional, and national) narratives of the Homeland War, and creating a comprehensive directory of memorial objects with accompanying data for each one.

Approaching the question of best practices for the memorialization of conflicts, as a historian of comparative collective memory I believe effective monuments and memorial spaces have the following characteristics: messages and texts that generate empathy among the visitors; aesthetic qualities resulting from contemporary artistic trends; architectural aspects that incorporate the memorial into the natural or urban landscape; and a functionality that encourages open discussion and a reflection on the past. The latter characteristic of course depends on the political and social environment of the site of memory, and aesthetic qualities are extremely subjective, but ultimately effective monuments are those that can contribute to improving the quality of public space and are a result of a variety of stakeholders (local, national, and potentially international) working together in realizing an appropriate representation of the past. There is also no

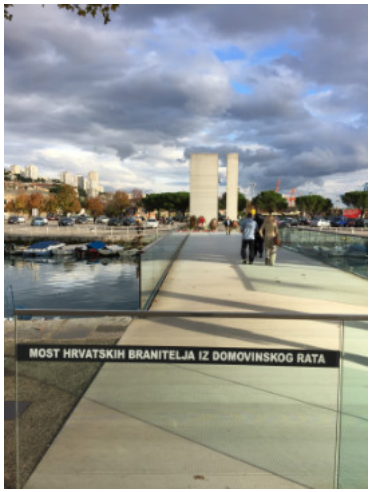
precise measurement of temporal distance from traumatic events, and various communities require different approaches in fostering reconciliation, focusing on solidarity, or creating public spaces that provoke a continuous critical examination of the past.

Although there are literally hundreds of examples to choose from, there are three monuments that I think fulfill the criteria for effective memorialization, even though one exposed some of the challenges of trying to implement best practices from outside. One of the most powerful sites of memory is the monument to war photographer Gordan Lederer, erected on the Čukur hillside above Hrvatska Kostajnica where he was shot by a sniper in 1991. The memorial site, in addition to a foot path and quotes by Lederer, features a large photographer's lens shattered by a bullet, overlooking the idyllic landscape and slow-moving Una River below that marks the border with Bosnia and Hercegovina. **(52)** The monument, "Broken Landscape", was designed by Petar Barišić and erected in 2015 by the architectural firm NFO. A second memory site which effectively combines material, symbolic, and functional characteristics is the Bridge of the Croatian Defenders of the Homeland War, erected in the city of Rijeka in 2001.[57] The monument functions as a pedestrian footbridge connecting the end of the city's main promenade, the Korzo, with the Delta, a large plateau in between the Dead Canal and Rječina River where mobilized soldiers left for and returned from battlefields in other parts of the country. **(53)** The architectural company that created the memorial bridge, 3LHD, won considerable public praise for the design, although some veteran groups were not satisfied with its abstract design and lack of details about the war. In 2019, veterans' organizations in Rijeka successfully petitioned the city to add a stone obelisk with the names of 206 fallen soldiers to the monument, which also resulted in the removal of the info plaque that explained the symbolism of structure in both Croatian and English. **(54)** The bridge serves as both a practical route across the Dead Canal and a commemorative space for a variety of remembrance practices throughout the year. The final site is the monument for Croatian Serb civilians killed in the aftermath of Operation Storm in the village of Gošić. Designed by architect David Kabalin and unveiled in 2013, the memorial site was envisioned as a gathering place under a tree in the center of the village. **(55)** Despite drawing on a wealth of best practices, the Zagreb-based architect had failed to take into account the behavior of local livestock, which could urinate and defecate on the

57 The original name of the monument was just Bridge of the Croatian Defenders, but the following year "of the Homeland War" was added.

(52) Hrvatska Kostajnica (2020)

(53) Rijeka (2015)



58 The memorial was later modified with the addition of an upright memorial plaque to replace the original one.

monument's memorial plaque, since it was located near ground level.[58] Nevertheless, the fact that architecturally sophisticated memorial spaces were being built in Croatia dedicated to victims "on the other side," who had for many years been tarred with the brush of collective guilt and deemed unworthy of remembrance, is an important step in creating a pluralistic memoryscape.

Looking to the future, the thirtieth anniversary of twelve-year-old Aleksandra Zec's murder (along with her parents) in Zagreb in 1991 raised the issue of how Croatian society can honor those individuals who lost their lives in the Homeland War while simultaneously accepting that unacceptable crimes were committed in the name of nation-building. Whether the memorialization of Zec will consist of a classic monument or public space, or a more innovative site of memory such as a center for peace remains to be seen, but successful solutions for this site and others will be ones that include a broad spectrum of social actors in dialogue, while seeking to create a tolerant society that can learn from the past and not be eternally trapped within it.

(54) Rijeka (2019)

(55) Gošić (2013)

Vjeran Pavlaković is an associate professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Rijeka, Croatia. He received his Ph.D. in History in 2005 from the University of Washington, and has published articles on cultural memory, transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia, and the Spanish Civil War. He is a co-editor of the volume *Framing the Nation and Collective Identity in Croatia* (Routledge, 2019), and other recent publications include "The Legacy of War and Nation-Building in Croatia since 1990," in Balkan Legacies: The Long Shadow of Conflict and Ideological Experiment in Southeastern Europe (Purdue UP, 2021), and "Memory Politics in the Former Yugoslavia" in Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (2020). He was the lead researcher on the Memoryscapes project as part of Rijeka's European Capital of Culture in 2020 and a co-founder of the Cres Summer School on Transitional Justice and Memory Politics. Current research includes transnational muralization of conflict and a history of Dalmatian immigrants in the American Southwest.

YIHR