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SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH ON THE WAR IN CROATIA IN CROATIAN AND SERBIAN LITERATURE

The war in Croatia, which took place in 1991–1995, has attracted a lot of attention among Croatian and Serbian academics, journalists and statesmen. Croatia was one of the six constituent republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia before its independence. At the time, the population was comprised mainly of Croats (78.1% in 1991), but also a considerable number of Serbs (12.2% of the total population). The war, which broke out more than 25 years ago, is one of the most popular and most important research subjects in Croatia and Serbia. In this paper, I will present some characteristics of the research on the war in Croatian and Serbian literature.

CROATIAN AND SERBIAN AUTHORS ON THE WAR IN CROATIA

The war in Croatia is a subject on which many authors have written in both Croatia and Serbia. The writers can be classified roughly into four groups.¹

The first group consists of former officers of the Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslovenska narodna armija or JNA), such as, in the Croatian literature, Martin Špegelj,² Janko Bobetko,³ Davor Domazet-Lošo,⁴ and in the Serbian literature Veljko Kadijević,⁵ Branko Mamula,⁶ Nikola Čubra,⁷ Miroslav Hadžić,⁸ Milisav Sekulić,⁹ and Dragan Vukšić.¹⁰ They write both from the view point of a military expert and an involved party.

The second group is composed of political figures, such as Stjepan Mesić¹¹ and Davorin Rudolf¹² in Croatian literature, and Borisav Jović¹³ in Serbian literature. This group of authors also writes from the viewpoint of a participant in the War. Works written by the first and the second group of authors are very important historical documents for research on the war, because the primary historical records have yet to be sufficiently disclosed.

The third group includes academic researchers, such as Davor Marijan,¹⁴

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- 1 In cases where an author could be classified into two or more groups, I have chosen to classify him/her into only one group for the sake of convenience.
 - 2 Špegelj, Martin. *Sjećanja vojnika*. Zagreb: Znanje, 2001. Špegelj was an army commander in the JNA and Croatian Minister of Defense (1990–1991).
 - 3 Bobetko, Janko. *Sava je ipak potekla prema Zagrebu*. Zagreb: private publishing, 2002. Bobetko was a high-ranking JNA officer and Chief of the Croatian General Staff.
 - 4 Domazet-Lošo, Davor. *Hrvatska i veliko ratište: međunarodne igre na prostoru zvanom bivša Jugoslavija*, Zagreb: Udruga Sv. Jurja, 2002. Domazet-Lošo was a JNA officer and Croatian Chief of the General Staff.
 - 5 Kadijević, Veljko. *Moje viđenje raspada: vojska bez države*. Beograd: Politika, 1993. Kadijević was a Yugoslav Federal Minister of Defense.
 - 6 Mamula, Branko. *Slučaj Jugoslavija*. Podgorica: CID, 2000. Mamula was the Yugoslav Federal Minister of Defense before Kadijević.
 - 7 Čubra, Nikola. *Vojska i razbijanje Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Centar za vojno-ekonomska i strategijska istraživanja, 1997. Čubra was an assistant of the Yugoslav Federal Minister of Defense.
 - 8 Hadžić, Miroslav. *Jugoslovenska narodna agonija*. Beograd: Centar za civilno-vojne odnose, 2004.
 - 9 Sekulić, Milisav. *Jugoslaviju niko nije branio a vrhovna komanda je izdala*. Beograd: Vesti, 1997. Sekulić was an officer in both the JNA and the Army of the Serbian Republic of Krajina.
 - 10 Vukšić, Dragan. *JNA i raspad SFR Jugoslavije: od čuvara do grobara svoje države*. Stara Pazova: Tekomgraf, 2006. Vukšić was a JNA officer.
 - 11 Mesić, Stjepan. *Kako je srušena Jugoslavija*. Zagreb: Mislavpress, 1994. Mesić was Croatia's delegate in the Yugoslav Presidency and the first Prime Minister of the newly independent Croatia.
 - 12 Rudolf, Davorin. *Rat koji nismo htjeli : Hrvatska 1991*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 1999. Rudolf was a professor at the University of Split, as well as the Croatian Minister of Maritime Affairs and Foreign Affairs.
 - 13 Jović, Borisav. *Poslednji dani SFRJ*. Beograd: Politika, 1996. Jović was Serbia's representative in the Yugoslav Presidency.
 - 14 Marijan, Davor. *Slom Titove armije – JNA i raspada Jugoslavije 1987.–1992*. Zagreb: Tehnička knjiga, 2008.

Nikica Barić,¹⁵ Anđelko Mijatović,¹⁶ Ozren Žunec,¹⁷ Mirko Valentić,¹⁸ and Ivo Goldstein¹⁹ in Croatia, and Bojan B. Dimitrijević²⁰ in Serbia.

Broadly speaking, a higher level of interest in the war can be seen in the Croatian literature than in the Serbian. As will be mentioned later in more detail, the fact that the Croatian government established the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Center for the Homeland War for the purpose of furthering research on the war shows how deep the interest in Croatia is. Another point that illustrates the magnitude of interest in Croatia is that some historians there such as Valentić and Mijatović, who had not studied modern or contemporary history, have endeavored to write books on the war.

The fourth group of writers is made up of journalists and columnists, such as Đuro Gajdek²¹ and Slaven Letica²² in Croatia, and Dobrila Gajić-Glišić²³ in Serbia. These authors themselves are not among the most important politicians in their countries, but some of them are close to significant political or military figures. For example, Letica was chief political adviser of the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, while Gajić-Glišić served as the chief of the Cabinet of the Serbian Minister of Defense Tomislav Simović. Their writings tend to have much value as historical sources.

NAMING OF THE WAR IN CROATIA

Put simply, the linguistic qualification of the war in Croatia in Croatian and Serbian literature indicates how the authors in the two countries view it.

In Croatian national history, the war in the 1990s is often called the “Homeland War (Domovinski rat)”. The war broke out in Croatia as the country

15 Barić, Nikica. *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj: 1990.–1995.* Zagreb: Tehnička knjiga, 2005.

16 Mijatović, Anđelko. *OTKOS-10: prva uspješna oslobodilačka operacija Oružanih snaga Republike Hrvatske u Domovinskom ratu: Domovinski rat u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1991. Godine.* Zagreb: Udruga dragovoljaca i veterana Domovinskog rata Republike Hrvatske, Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2011.

17 Žunec, Ozren et al. *Oficir i časnik: prelasci vojnih profesionalaca iz Jugoslavenske narodne armije u Hrvatsku vojsku.* Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2013.

18 Valentić, Mirko. *Rat protiv Hrvatske: 1991.–1995.: velikosrpski projekti od ideje do realizacije.* Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje; Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2010.

19 Goldstein, Ivo. *Hrvatska 1918.–2008.* Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2008.

20 Dimitrijević, Bojan. *Modernizacija i intervencija: jugoslavenske oklopne jedinice 1945–2006.* Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2010.

21 Gajdek, Đuro. *Petrinjska bojišnica 1991.–1995.* Petrinja: Grad Petrinja, 2008.

22 Letica, Slaven. *JNA – rat protiv Hrvatske: scenarij vojnog udara u Hrvatskoj i metode specijalnog rata u njegovoj pripremi.* Zagreb: Ingot Fakta, 1991. Letica was a professor at University of Zagreb. In addition, he is actively involved in various fields, such as that of a commentator.

23 Gajić-Glišić, Dobrila. *Srpska vojska: iz kabineta ministra vojnog.* Beograd: Admiral books, 1992. Gajić-Glišić is a journalist.

was seeking independence. The Croats fought against the armed forces of the local Serbian population in Croatia, the JNA, and paramilitary formations coming from Serbia, and suffered numerous casualties in the process. The Serbs in Croatia controlled about one third of the territory of Croatia during the conflict. However, in 1995, Croatia carried out the successful military operations, such as the “Flash” and the “Storm”, and restored control over its entire territory. In this context, the war was indispensable for the achievement of Croatian independence and represents a justification of the sacrifices made for that independence.

In Croatia, there are many books where the title includes the phrase “Homeland War”.²⁴ In them the involvement of the JNA in the war is referred to as the “aggression” or “attack” of the Yugoslav People’s Army,²⁵ while the character of the conflict between the Croats and Serbs in Croatia is often described as the “insurrection of the Serbs (pobuna Srba)”.²⁶ The adjective “greater Serbian (velikosrpski)”²⁷ is also used when criticizing the wartime goals of Serbia, the Serbs living in Croatia, and the JNA in the conflict. In the JNA, the proportion of Serbs increased during the process of the breakup of former Yugoslavia.

In comparison to the above Croatian view of the war, the Serbian understanding of the conflict seems more complex and diverse. For the Serbs from Croatia, Croatia or, more precisely, the Serb-populated areas in Croatia, were their homeland. Their hope of staying within Yugoslavia remained unrealized in the course of the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Confronted by the Croatian government, they established the so-called “Republic of Serbian Krajina” (Republika Srpska Krajina) on the territory of Croatia. They often refer to the war in Croatia as a “civil war (građanski rat)” between Serbs and Croats.²⁸ On the other hand, for the Serbs from Serbia, the war in Croatia was not “their own”, in a sense. In 1991 and 1992, Serbian soldiers from Serbia waged the war as members of the Yugoslav Peoples’ Army and the Territorial Defense of Serbia. In addition, paramilitaries from Serbia joined the war. This variety of Serb involvement in the war in Croatia is reflected in the terms the Serbs use to refer to the conflict. For example, some Serbian authors, such as Dušan Vilić and Boško Todorović,²⁹ former officers of the JNA, use the term “rebellion (pobuna)” when referring to the Croats, not the Serbs, thus strongly condemning them for the break-up of Yugoslavia.

24 For example Radelić, Zdenko et al.. *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat*. Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Školska knjiga, 2006.

25 Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1990.-1995.*; Radelić, *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat*.

26 For example, Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj*.

27 Valentić, *Rat protiv Hrvatske*.

28 For example Budimir, Miloško (ed.). *Građanski rat u Hrvatskoj 1991.-1995.: zbornik radova*. 9, Beograd: Udruženje Srba iz Hrvatske, 2013.

29 Vilić, Dušan, Todorović, Boško. *Razbijanje Jugoslavije: 1990.-1992*. Beograd: Književne novine, 1995.

While the terms “conflict (sukob)” and “war (rat)” can be understood as neutral words for referring to the war in Croatia, “war against Croatia (rat protiv Hrvatske)”, which some Croatian authors³⁰ use, seems to contain the same level of condemnation of the Serbs or the JNA as do the words “rebellion” and “aggression”.

HISTORICAL SOURCES ON THE WAR IN CROATIA

In both the Croatian and the Serbian literature on the war in Croatia, memoirs written by former officers and politicians are often used as historical sources. In particular, the memoirs of Jović, Kadijević, Mamula, Špegelj, and Konrad Kolšek³¹ are frequently cited by researchers of this subject. In Croatian literature, Marijan’s *The Collapse of Tito’s Army* and Barić’s *The Rebellion of Serbs in Croatia* are noteworthy in that they are based on a vast array of primary sources that have not been released to the public yet. In Serbian literature, Dimitrijević’s study³² can be viewed as an equivalent, in that he seems to have used documents from historical archives in Serbia that are not fully open yet, such as the archives of the military, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Staff, and the Yugoslav government. In general, there have not been many studies in Serbia on the war in Croatia based on primary documents.

On the other hand, the Croatian government is in the process of organizing the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Center for the Homeland War (Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata),³³ in order to collect and arrange the relevant historical documents, make them available to the public and publish a part of them.³⁴ The center is one of the most useful existing institutions in terms of research on the war.

In contrast, the Serbian government does not seem to be proactive when it comes to the disclosure of historical documents on the war and does not seem as attentive in observing the regulations concerning the year of the disclosure for historical documents. As for the Military Archive in Serbia, it makes historical

30 Valentić, *Rat protiv Hrvatske*.

31 Kolšek, Konrad. *Prvi pucnji u SFRJ: sećanja na početak oružanih sukoba u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj*. Beograd: Dan graf, 2005. Kolšek was a JNA commander.

32 Dimitrijević, Bojan. *Jugoslovensko ratno vazduhoplovstvo: 1942–1992*. Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2009; Dimitrijević, *Modernizacija i intervencija*.

33 <http://centardomovinskograta.hr/>, accessed on 26 Nov. 2016.

34 Such as Rupić, Mate (ed.). *Republika Hrvatska i Domovinski rat: 1990.–1995.: dokumenti. Knj. 1, Oružana pobuna Srba u Hrvatskoj i agresija oružanih snaga SFRJ i srpskih paravojskih postrojbi na Republiku Hrvatsku: (1990.–1991.)*. Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2007.

documents available to researchers only upon the passage of 50 years from the date of their issue.³⁵

Also, the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY)³⁶ has produced a vast number of documents which are accessible on the Internet. A portion of these relates closely to the war and is very useful for research on it.

REGIONAL SITUATIONS

The war in Croatia was fought in most parts of Croatia. There are many studies or works that focus on the situations in different regions and local battlefields during the war. Among them, there are studies that deal with the wartime situations in small towns, whereby the latter subject has mainly been covered by Croatian authors. These studies are often based on personal notes, memories, or some primary documents in the individual possession of the participants in the war.

For example, Gajdek's book *The Battlefield of Petrinja 1991–1995*³⁷ gives a detailed account of the situation in the town of Petrinja. It describes life in the town during the war, how the fighting started in it, how it continued and ended – all this based on regional weekly publications, a lot of statements and eyewitness accounts by participants in the fighting, as well as a source from the Serbian Krajina authorities.

Furthermore, Biličić³⁸ wrote on the National Protection (Narodna zaštita) in Sisak, an industrial town in central Croatia. The National Protection is a resistance organization in Croatia that existed during the war. His book goes into much detail on the various activities that the National Protection undertook in Sisak.

As for Western Slavonia, Mijatović in his book *OTOKOS-10*³⁹ wrote about Croatian military operations in this region, which was among the first to experience fighting in the first phase of the war. The book *The Rebellion of the Serbs in Western Slavonia*,⁴⁰ edited by Miškulin and Barać, contains nine articles written

35 http://www.vojniarhiv.mod.gov.rs/sadrzaj.php?id_sadrzaja=99&active=tekst/, last accessed on 27 Nov. 2016.

36 <http://www.icty.org/>, last accessed on 27 Nov. 2016.

37 Gajdek, *Petrinjska bojišnica*.

38 Biličić, Bartol. *Narodna zaštita Siska u Domovinskom ratu: 1991.–1992*. Zagreb: Udruga dragovoljaca Narodne zaštite Domovinskog rata; Sisak: Gradska udruga dragovoljaca Narodne zaštite Domovinskog rata, 2004.

39 Mijatović, *OTOKOS-10*.

40 Miškulin, Ivica, Barać, Mladen (eds.). *Srpska pobuna u Zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.–1995.: nositelji, institucije, posljedice: zbornik radova*. Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje; Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2012.

by experts who specialize in various fields and areas of life, such as political parties, the Orthodox Church, the JNA, the functioning of the national parliament, the police and the judicial system, war crimes and demography. In addition, the book also contains historical documents.

In the Serbian literature, however, there are fewer research works on the war which focus in detail on regions.

FOCUS ON BATTLES AND OPERATIONS

Another feature of the literature on the war in Croatia is that, both in Croatia and Serbia, the battle for Vukovar and the Croatian operation Storm seem to be perceived as exceptionally important, although in completely different ways. According to the Croatian historical narrative, Croatia was attacked by the Serbs and the JNA and Vukovar is a town that symbolizes the resistance to that attack, which is why Vukovar is considered to be a Hero City that stood firmly against the “Serbian aggression”. Furthermore, for Croats, the operation Storm in 1995 was a successful military campaign against the Republic of Serbian Krajina, which dealt the decisive blow to the rebellious Serbs.

Thus, both the Battle for Vukovar and the operation Storm are extremely interesting topics to the Croats.⁴¹ Judging by the Serbian literature, however, Vukovar also seems to be an important city for the Serbs, because the locals belonging to that ethnicity and the JNA paid a considerable price in lives to seize it. However, due to the operation Storm, many Serbs were forced to escape from the territory of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, including Vukovar, which is why that operation is often strongly denounced in the Serbian literature.⁴²

As mentioned before, the Croatian and Serbian literature on the war in Croatia are very different from each other and often contain completely opposite conclusions. A significant number of the authors seem to be trying to consolidate the history of the ethnic group they belong to. Nonetheless, there are some exceptions. For example, *The Dialogue of Historians*⁴³ is a collection of papers that contains works mostly written by both Croatian and Serbian historians. Another example is the Journal of the Institute of Modern History in Belgrade,⁴⁴ which was published in 2011 and contains 11 articles, of which six are on the

41 For instance, Marijan, Davor. *Bitka za Vukovar*. Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest; Slavonski Brod: Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2004 and Marijan, Davor. *Oluja*. Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2009.

42 Budimir, *Građanski rat u Hrvatskoj*.

43 One of them is Fleck, Hans-Georg, Graovac, Igor (eds.). *Dijalog povjesničara – istoričara*. Zagreb: Zaklada Friedrich Naumann, 2000.

44 *Istorija 20. veka: časopis Instituta za savremenu istoriju*, 29, 2, 2011.

Yugoslav wars, written by one Slovene, two Croats and three Serbs. Croatian historians Marijan and Barić and Serbian historian Dimitrijević wrote articles on the war in Croatia from their respective different viewpoints. It is important that historians whose views are different discuss disputable subjects or at least cooperate in publications in order to advance the research. I hope that such joint projects and cooperative work between Croatian and Serbian scholars will continue to increase in the future, and thus contribute to a fruitful development of the research on the war in Croatia.