

# PERSONAL NARRATIVES ON WAR: A CHALLENGE TO WOMEN'S ESSAYS AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN CROATIA

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In other words, it is not reference but interactional accomplishment through rhetorically powerful words which is the focus of this analytical perspective (...) These notions are, on the one hand, meaningless (meaning=reference) to the extent that each person or social group can invest them with particular experiences. On the other hand, these notions are also saturated with meaning (meaning=sense) to the extent that there is relatively little disagreement about them as cultural values. (Gullestad, 1991:91)

In this article I would like to situate Croatian wartime and war-related women's ethnographies within today's genre-crossing scene of cultural representations in the humanities and literature. Slovenian writer Drago Jančar depicts acridly the provocative issue of trendy writings and the reception of radically *other*, unfamiliar and gruesome war experiences:

There is something improper about human calamity, something man himself can be blamed for, and it is grueling to grasp. And, above all, we have seen all that and read about it (...) all about those concentration camps in Bosnia and we have learned everything about the rapes, too. All these drastic expressions have already been worn out – give us something ordinary (...) The readership now prefers scenes from everyday life in totalitarian regimes, what people ate, that is, what they didn't eat, dress, drink or like. Finally, these are the scenes one can understand ... Now a reader in Western countries likes to read books on the subject of: How we survived without nylons and even laughed (1995: 115, 116; my translation).

Some of the main focuses of this article echo in Jančar's words: a) the dispute on the "correct" articulation and presentation of first-hand war experiences; b) the rift in Western reception and understanding of these experiences burdened with local and historical knowledge;<sup>1</sup> c) the phenomenon of gendered writings as

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<sup>1</sup> "The unbearable is not the *difference*. The unbearable is the fact that in a sense there is no difference: There are no exotic bloodthirsty 'Balkanians' in Sarajevo, just normal citizens like us. The moment we take full note of this fact, the frontier that separates 'us' from 'them' is exposed in all its arbitrariness, and we are forced to renounce the safe distance of external observers (...) it is no longer possible to draw a clear and unambiguous line of separation between us who live in a 'true' peace and the residents of Sarajevo who pretend as far as possible that they are living in peace – we are forced to admit that in a sense we also imitate peace, live in the fiction of peace. Sarajevo is not an island, an exception within the sea of normality; on the contrary, this alleged normality is itself an island of fictions within the common warfare" (Žižek, 1994: 2).

well as gendered readings; and d) the new opportunity for the ethnographic essay among other cultural discourses.

The transition, war, liberation and independence that took place from 1991 to 1995 penetrated deeply all segments of individual and communal, private and public life in Croatia. Reflecting on the cultural processing and discursive transposition of war reality, Croatian folklorists and ethnologists<sup>2</sup> – together with other domestic scholars in the humanities and social sciences – had to cope, first of all, with the problem of how to respond ethically to the horrors of war which destroyed the basic fabrics of civil society. Our genuine dilemma was *how* and *to whom* we could direct our professional observations presented in an ethnographic manner as – we managed to believe – the voices of analytical prudence and human empathy. In the days of war misfortune shrank “this ever shrinking space which we were still able to recognize as the professional part of our own being” (Čale Feldman et. al., 1993: 3) and sharpened full-frontal contact with an immediate political and military space of power constellations which influenced all media and discursive practices. Already directed by the postmodern critical drive in social theory which demands that scholars take into consideration all those epistemological, disciplinary and institutional presuppositions which from outside guarantee the authority, competence and “correctness” of their interpretations the contributors of Croatian war ethnography<sup>3</sup> were surprised by the extent to which our human and scholars’ agency is conditioned (or blocked) by Western political support for the rhetoric of multiculturalism which had been projected onto the petrified image of the former Yugoslavia. While we discussed whether the ethnographic portrayal of war reality represents the very scene of the postmodern anthropological discussion of always partial, biased and incomplete

<sup>2</sup> Croatian folklorists who have had long and fruitful connections with European folklore scholarship were recently the subject of a important reorientation. On the one side, folkloristics does not exist as a separate discipline within Croatian academia and it is represented scholarly only by the Zagreb Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, which in 1998 celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Within Croatian humanities there was and still is an institutionally clear distinction between folklore research as a philological domain of study and ethnology as a branch of historical studies, with a tacit tendency to give priority to ethnological projects. On the other side, most of my young colleagues tried to connect their interdisciplinary orientation, their semiotic or hermeneutic preference and contextual analysis with the interpretation of new cultural phenomena such as the penetration of military vocabulary into everyday communication, the influence of oral tradition on ethnic prejudices spread by the media, the permeation of state designed *folklorismus* with up-to-date front-line military and refugee folklore production, the relatedness of high art and popular artistic practice in wartime, and the role of refugees’ or prisoners’ testimonial discourse within public historiography and literature.

<sup>3</sup> My colleagues have published three collections of essays in English which reflect our research priorities and exemplify our modes of writing: Čale Feldman, Senjković and Prica, eds. (1993); Jambrešić Kirin and Povržanović, eds. (1996); Pettan, ed. (1998). These books faced opposite reactions and some flattering confirmation by colleagues with field experience in wartime Croatia. Our starting assumptions are expressed as follows: “The articles (...) do not ‘explain’ the war. The war does not ‘illustrate’ the articles. The authors have (...) tried to respond to the challenge to a scientist’s consciousness. They have recorded and systematized the chaos around them and inside them, but they have also recognized order in the chaos. They have used proven ways of reflecting on their profession, but they have also tried to find new ones by searching for a methodology of war ethnography” (Čale Feldman, Prica, and Senjković, 1993: 1). Among other proponents of the insider’s anthropological discourse on war we would like to single out the theoretically demanding works by Dubravka Žarkov and Renata Salecl and the provocative feminist analyses by Svetlana Slapšak, Rada Iveković, Dasa Duhaček, together with the all-encompassing and lucid postmodern criticism of Slavoj Žižek.

ethnographic truths, at the same time the book marketplace was flooded with all kinds of seemingly objective, balanced and well-informed experts' texts which aimed to illustrate the nature of the war conflicts in Croatia and then in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Domestic anthropologists, ethnologists and folklorists tried to stress how various cultural responses to the imposed war in Croatia were determined not on the level of political options for or against nationalism, but on the existential level of survival – “it must not be forgotten that violence is the missing link between discourse and dying” (Povrzanović, 1999). The Serbian aggression in the summer of 1991, first in Slovenia and then in Croatia, represented a violent breach of political negotiations over the peaceful partition of Yugoslavia. Heavy weaponry on the streets of Croatian villages and towns radically shrank the public space of democratic discussion about the main problems of Croatian society in transition – rising ethnic animosity, economic decline or ideological shifts. So, we consider it ruthless and oversimplifying to observe the position of a civilian in war in the same way as the position of liberal individuals in a free society:<sup>4</sup>

The individual citizen had no chance to voice his protest or his opinion, not even his fear. He could only leave the country – and so people did. Those who used “I” instead of “we” in their language had to escape. It was this fatal difference in grammar that divided them from the rest of their compatriots (Drakulić, 1996: 3).

Some Croatian researchers who supported the idea of war ethnography dealt with the positive aspects of ritual manifestations of national homogeneity through public spectacles and political demonstrations as acts of coping with fear and pain, as well as the negative ones resulting from their political misuse which often turned expressions of resistance into a nationalistic vocabulary (cf. Čale Feldman 1993); some discussed the strategies of popular articulations and representations of war from Rambo iconography to prevailing signs of Christian symbolization of suffering (Senjković, 1993; Senjković, 1995; Senjković and Ključanin, 1995). But, all of us insisted on the difference between mediated and immediate lived war experiences (of being expelled, bombarded, tortured or drafted) which were recognized as the most important features of self-identification in the war years and as the most socially evaluated internalized knowledge of war because “suffering is profoundly social in the sense that it helps constitute the social world” (Kleinman et al., 1996: XVII). In that sense, as opposition to the pervasive

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<sup>4</sup> Many Western intellectuals embraced the idea that dreadful mechanism of nationalistic mutual exclusion -Serbian as well as Croatian- is the direct cause of genocidal violence which is, by the same logic, partially “deserved”. The trap of nationalistic logic was exemplified with the more fashionable example “to be Croatian is to be non-Serb. And each affirms him – or herself as unique and non-other, as though there were room only for one and not for two” (Cixous, 1993), but such anti-nationalist discourses recognizing only nationalists and cosmopolitans “often depend upon and themselves construct a notion of fixed positions – mirror image of the nationalist” (Stubbs, 1998: 6.2). Domestic researchers considered how the tendency to charge nationalistic discourses with all crimes and misdemeanors is an easy way to avoid accusing specifically individuals, political parties and movements for interethnic conflicts and fratricide.

nationalist discourse, there existed the local *moral communities* based on the shared suffering of all citizens of a besieged town or a destroyed village. We also emphasized the subversive potential of the embodied experience of violence which, at the same time, can serve as the platform for national homogenization as well as a radical obstacle to the totalization of “the heterogeneity of private grief into homogenized stereotypes of public mourning” (Kleinman et. al., 1996: XVII). Deprivation, loss and fear were generally recognized as the most acute shared feelings –“death and fear point to the connections between politics and experience that lie at the very heart of social life, connecting social memory and individual practice, suffering and society”(ibid.) – which led to armed struggle and civil resistance in the form of sustaining everyday routines in war circumstances (Čale Feldman et. al., 1993, Jambrešić Kirin, 1996b; Povrzanović, 1997; Povrzanović, 1997).

Female ethnographers tried to single out the dominant strategies, stereotypes and constraints of *hegemonic, speculative* as well as *emancipatory, embodied* discourses. Both types were seen not as separate semantic practices and moral values, but as intermingled narrative orientations in which the influence of nationalistic ideology, religious contemplation and the rhetoric of the victim were present. Whereas, the personal accounts of a perpetrator and a victim may share a similar ethnic animosity, or a similar validation of the socialist past, events of the war or home they cannot contain the same moral truth and cannot be approached in the same “objective” way. From my perspective, the widely recognized critical women’s writings by Dubravka Ugrešić, Slavenka Drakulić or Rada Iveković and personal accounts of the war published by ordinary people (refugees, combatants, war prisoners) are the main cultural phenomena of (post)war Croatia. People without literary skill stressed that an effort made to verbally articulate their experience was almost equal to the hardships of survival, but that this seems to be the only dignified way of commemorating murdered friends, neighbors, and combatants. The manifold personal drives for displaying one’s own version of events are the signs of a desirable pluralization and democratization of the recent Croatian historical narrative. There is also an orientation towards an *oral history* approach, an impulse for making history from below according to which people consider official sources basically statistical, detached, limited and insufficient to describe one’s own particular experience. At first glance, it seems that these discourses on war and exile, which can be classified as *popular* and *professional*, do not have much in common. A typical representative of the first group is characterized by repeated rhetorical devices, poor style, and is full of war-diary stereotypes, of Christian and patriotic sentiments borrowed from a national *grand récit* – exactly those features which successful Croatian writers avoid and deconstruct in a skillful postmodern way. But, on another level, they both share an autobiographical mode, with its specific way of achieving *l’effet du réel* by combining personal meanings, perspectives and details with a universal

sense of literary symbols and images- and the need to stress a radical change in the quality and depth of the war-time perceptions of life, values, heritage, time, and space.

There are also several good reasons for a multifarious comparison between the ethnographic discourses of Croatian women and those composed as personal essays, because both are marked by gendered, self-reflective and critical assessments as well as by an intention to focus straightforwardly some of the main issues of contemporary transdisciplinary theory: *identity, history, memory, displacement, migration*. Similarities as well as remarkable differences are partially the consequence of the postmodern genre-crossing scene of cultural representations in theory and literature as well as the self-undermining of the basic notions of the humanities – *truth, universalism, humanism, general validation, intercultural translations*. While ethnographers attempted to find a way of balancing analytical and self-reflexive writings with presentation of the first-person accounts of traumatic experiences, the authors of autobiographical essays were against cynical humanitarianism and media appropriations of other's suffering. But they themselves often did cynically represent and (mis)interpret individual feelings and observations as given from a viewpoint of a witness.

## GENDERED APPROACH TO IMPOSED HISTORY

Still, the other examples made it clear: although it is easier to accuse marxism as such for intolerance, violence and callousness, I rather tend to believe that the problem concerns people and circumstances. What I believe today (which I don't owe to them) is that it is still possible to think in a tolerant manner, not trying to impose your opinion on others (Iveković, 1988: 49).

Whereas female Croatian writers interpret differently the features of the political and social conditions in the former Yugoslavia which led to war conflicts in Croatia, and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina, their similar feminist critiques are evident in interpretations of those examples which point to the “natural” union of nationalism, misogyny and ostracism.<sup>5</sup> What's more, in 1992 some of these

<sup>5</sup> Ugrešić has always refused to take any feminist or politically biased position saying that “only men and idiots can be engaged in something so dull as politics is”. Socialist Yugoslavia, being half way between East and West, was, in Ugrešić's opinion, characterized by openness and receptiveness to current cultural and social movements from the West. At the close of the 1980s Rada Iveković joined those who critically reexamined the petrified ideological heritage of society and its in-depth patriarchal and totalitarian structure, and tried to reveal the causes of the absence of an appropriate political answer in her generation: “we’ (I was born in 1945, in the second Yugoslavia) should have been a generation without political destiny, the embodiment of their happiness and their political project (‘they’, the generation of partisan parents). *Through us*, they would enjoy the fruits of their creation in advance, by projection, but that meant that we had to be a generation made historically irresponsible, a political epi-subject where they were the political subject” (1997: 101). Drakulić offers a similar view: “We didn't build a political underground of people with liberal, democratic values ready to take over the government; not because it was impossible, but on the contrary, because the repression was not hard enough to produce the need for

authors – Rada Iveković (a philosopher and the most competent Croatian feminist critic), journalist and writer Slavenka Drakulić and writer Dubravka Ugrešić were, along with several other female Croatian intellectuals, branded “witches” in the Croatian weekly *Globus* and for some time they became “scapegoats” to nationalist intellectuals as well as to those of the opposition, since they belittled the national consensus on the independence of Croatia. Having temporarily left Croatia, they became the most agile critics of Croatian state nationalism, its attempt to positively re-evaluate the Nazi past, war-induced crime, and autocracy of the government. The accusation that these feminists did not make use of their access to foreign media to bring out “the truth on rapes” in Bosnia-Herzegovina became a pretext for the media campaign against “witches”. It was, in fact, a chauvinist attitude that feminists should engage in “women’s affairs” – rapes as a form of Serbian aggression and “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia – instead of their denigration of the war-exhausted “young Croatian state”.

Actually, Drakulić’s essays on war rapes appeared a short time later in American journals and, together with essays by Roy Gutman and other journalists, provoked a stronger response in the public than the first detailed surveys and interpretations. These essays represent a sort of preliminary anthropological approach focusing on the sore points of interpreting extreme experiences of war crimes against women: the problem of interviewing tortured people and the problem of cognitive and verbal processing of embodied experiences of pain, humiliation and dishonor. They were later followed by more detailed anthropological, psychiatric and feminist interpretations by (to mention only the most influential) the American, German, Croatian, and Bosnian authors represented in Alexandra Stiglmayer’s collection *Mass Rape* (1994), by Croatian-American anthropologist Marija Olujić (1995), Bosnian journalist Seada Vranić (1996); the psychoanalytical interpretation by Slovenian author Renata Salecl (1994), and the sociological critique of typical Western feminist attitudes done by Dubravka Žarkov (1997), a Belgrade author working in the Netherlands, should also be mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Feminist interpretations tried to read mass rape in Bosnia in the context of shared attitudes on the symbolic ambivalence of women during the whole history of Judeo-Christian Western culture, the ambivalence that was once again zealously used in nationalist war propaganda on all sides, reviving the symbolic analogy between the notions: *women/rape/chastity* and *homeland/aggression/fight*. But the anthropologists who recorded and analyzed more comprehensively the embodied discourse of rape victims righteously emphasize that it is not correct

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it. If there is any excuse it is in the fact that we were deprived of the sense of future. This was the worst thing that communism did to people” (1993: 136).

<sup>6</sup> Žarkov convincingly demonstrated how some articles published in Stiglmayer (1994) “concerned with doing justice to the victims of sexual assaults”, through the construction of the *Rape Victim Identity* as an exclusive preserve of Muslim women, actually make all other victims less victimized and less important while re-producing ethnicity as “the ultimate divide, as the only legitimate base of victimisation and only possible claim for vindication” (Žarkov, 1997: 150). Paradoxically and poignantly, these authors followed the scenario of the nationalist propaganda in different parts of the former Yugoslavia in the 80s, particularly in Serbia,

(in the historical, anthropological and political sense) to blame primarily the logic of symbolically inscribing territorial conquests on women's bodies for mass rape in Bosnia.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion on the relevance of predominantly symbolic and predominantly sociological interpretations exceeds the abstract scholars' domain. Besides, it has not been agreed whether it is therapeutically more effective and more ethical to "persuade" victims of rape into a belief that the act of violence was not targeted against them as persons (so that they should not have the feeling of dishonor) but against them as anonymous representatives of a nation. Or, is it more ethical to emphasize the individual guilt of perpetrators who are not anonymous members of "aggressors", and encourage the violated women to identify their rapists so that they can be brought to justice. Žarkov claims that in most of the feminist writings on Bosnian mass rape one can notice the protection of perpetrators as an unintended outcome, since "the abstract crime, however horrific, may have only an abstract villain. The demonic Serb from MacKinnon's texts is no less abstract for his viciousness, for if he is any and every Serb, no prosecution is possible" (1997: 151). The wartime polarizations, accusations and bigotry along the ethnic line saturated feminist discourse too. Thus, the logic of the victim – who recognized the immediate perpetrator of the violent act in the concrete person of *other* nationality, not in the nationalism (of her or his own community) as such – was considered the main obstacle to the establishment of consensus about the war on behalf of feminists in the area of former Yugoslavia.

However, what brings Drakulić and Ugrešić into the limelight over and over again are unexpected insights, ironic reversals and the effect of estrangement resulting from the experience of their own positions as voluntary exiles within "not yet adopted" post-Yugoslav political and social realities, insights which are evident in their comparative readings of West and East through, as Michael Fischer once said, the mirror of bifocality – "seeing others against a background of ourselves, and ourselves against a background of others". The mirror of bifocality helps the authors to reflect the fragments of past and present, neighboring and foreign, documentary and literary realities, confirming once again that "in postmodern fiction, the literary and the historiographical are always being brought together (...) often with unnerving results" (Hutcheon, 1989: 101). Drakulić endeavors to confront the shifting politics of memorizing and forgetting typical for the communist, but also post-communist syndrome of reshaping history – *I cannot allow myself to be a tourist in my own past* – and, what seems more difficult, the

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where "the construction of an ultimate Victim has been inseparable from the construction of ethnic Self and ethnic enemy" (op.cit.: 149).

<sup>7</sup> "What we have in mind here is rape as 'weapon' used especially by Serbs against Muslims. The form it takes – the raping of a girl (or a boy, for that matter) in the presence of her father, forced to witness the affair- is bound to set in motion the vicious cycle of guilt: the father – the representative of authority, of the big Other – is exposed in his utter impotence, which makes him guilty in his own eyes as well as in those of his daughter: the daughter is guilty for causing her father's humiliation; and so on. The rape thus entails, besides the girl's physical and psychic suffering, the disintegration of the entire familial socio-symbolic network" Žižek, 1994: 74).

nostalgic memory of the banality and ideological indoctrination of everyday socialist life.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Ugrešić admits:

I have always thought (...) that a writer who respects himself has to avoid three things: a) autobiographical notes, b) notes on other countries, c) journal notes (...) The book [*Have a Nice Day*] was, well, written against my personal and literary attitudes (1993: 9, my translation).

Also, contrary to the author's intention, her brilliant reflections on the discrepancies of Western discourses of multiculturalism, solidarity and open borders, and on the European ambivalent attraction and refusal of Westerners and Easterners, often fail to draw the attention of readers when compared to the stinging, welcome criticisms "of the perversions of political and cultural life in Croatia".

However, both writers often took the roles of ardent self-proclaimed spokeswomen for the "biggest" losers of the recent war, namely, those people who declared and considered themselves Yugoslavs. In a sense, they tried to suggest that the task of an "unbiased", "non-ideological" reconstruction of personal and collective past, uninfected by the *culture of lies*, is, in fact, the task of "mental effort", good will and personal responsibility towards one's own past. Whereas Ugrešić fears that the memory of individuals cannot be of any considerable importance and value, for it is a catalogue of artifacts of popular culture and a history of triviality and banality, folklorism and conformism supported by communist ideology, Drakulić has created a unique essayistic form of a sort of phenomenological encroachment upon the suppressed history of women's everyday lives under socialism. The postmodern collage of essays, sketches and *feuilletons* published by Croatian female authors can be, for example, distinguished from Rebecca West's travelogue, replete with detailed historical references, by their ambivalent inclination to the self-bounded perspective – "my texts do not exceed the significance of a small footnote to events in Europe at the end of the twentieth century" (Ugrešić, 1998a: 9) – and skillful sliding between personal and objective, in-depth and panoramic views. Thus Ugrešić's prevailing cynical attitude towards those who survived the recent war – for her, survival is "a state of emotional, social and moral autism (...) permanent damage, a sort of callousness" (1993: 205) because "the quantity of evil heaped on the innocent in Sarajevo has spilled over like radioactive poison (...) everyone has received a dose of radiation" (1998a: 6,7) – provokes a Western reader to conclude that Ugrešić talks about seelenlosen, manipulierten Jugo-Zombies (on the cover of the German edition of *The Cultures of Lies*).<sup>9</sup>

However, what most endangers the feminist credibility of Drakulić's intelligent

<sup>8</sup> "People live without the past, both collective and individual. This has been the prescribed way of life for the past forty-five years, when it was assumed that history began in 1941 with the War and the revolution. The new history of the state of Croatia also begins with war and revolution and with eradicating the memory of the forty-five years under communism. Obviously, this is what we have been used to again" (Drakulić, 1993: 75).

<sup>9</sup> Croatian critics believe that the basic problem arises from the fact that Drakulić writes some kind of "cultural



and lucid essays, particularly in *Café Europa*, is her support of an idealized perception of economically developed, urbanized and socially settled Western societies with high aesthetic and hygienic standards of living, contrasted with the picturesque and ugly portrayal of “the disgusting disorder” typical for the majority of transitional societies whose inhabitants so zealously long for Europe “and all that it stands for”. In the case of Rumania, which was also the object of the long-term research of Katherine Verdery (but not only there):

The communist crash course in urbanisation did not help the newcomers to change their habits, whether it was wearing fur hats, or using toilet paper and properly cleaning a toilet after using it. People were forced to jump from a village into a city, to make the giant leap from feudalism to communism (...) This historical mistake has to be corrected now, but I am afraid that it will take time and that those of us who live in these countries in the post-communist era will have to wash our hands and use paper for many years, before we really stand a chance of developing democracy. One without the other – that won't work (Drakulić 1996, 36-7).<sup>10</sup>

Attitudes like this “rationally” justify those cultural and social criteria that determine the European policy of inclusion of *Others* into the EU, belittling the significance of (more important) political, strategic and ideological criteria and encouraging interpretations according to which even the acknowledgment of human rights is given particular and “contextual” meanings. However, they neglect the focus of feminist critique which, together with cultural studies, persistently points to omnipresent and more sophisticated sex discrimination (along with race, ethnic and class discrimination) as the constitutive “error” of those economically and legally advanced Western societies which are considered the most progressive, despite the fact that violence, poverty and clan mentality are still endemic, as long as there is toilet paper everywhere and everyone regularly sees his or her dentist. Likewise, the view that an emotional, biased, “distorted” relation toward the past characterizes communist subjects who lack “a cool and rational insight into our history and the true merits of this and that man” (Drakulić, 1996: 152) seems to disregard the basic premise of the new historical thinking that any, even professional, view of history has to a large extent emerged from a temporary ideological constellation, its own preoccupations and affiliations, limitations and the demands of a specific time. Unfortunately, it is easy to recognize, always and everywhere, the effects of an historiographic procedure according to which:

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confession, where reportage fragments are interwoven with confessional and essayistic digressions” (Gordana Crnković). Many of them appreciate the writer's skill in transforming a detail, some common image, into a starting point and metaphor for reconsideration of social and political phenomena, but they also warn that “the easiness of that imperceptible transfer from individual and palpable to general and abstract may sometimes appear as magician's trick, which it sometimes blatantly resembles” (Vanja Matković).

<sup>10</sup> “And all at once, instead of feeling sorry for the ‘Easterners’(...), I felt sorry for the ‘Westerners’ seeing how flimsy were the foundations of their self-assurance: toilet paper, passport, hard currency. (...) all at once, it seemed to me that the ‘Westerners’ needed that border, that symbolic roll of toilet paper as large and firm as the Great Wall of China, far more at this moment, because it showed, if nothing else, that they belonged to a softer, more

It is history as a washing machine: you throw in your dirty laundry, add a little ideology as detergent, and out comes a bright, clean, almost new shirt, ready to wear until it gets dirty again (Drakulić, 1996: 153).

To criticisms of an inherited collectivist mentality connected with the “dysfunctional communist system itself and its failure to recognize and fulfill people’s basic needs”, Drakulić adds a slow process of adoption of an ideology of individual liberalism, which means the reliance of an individual on his or her own work, desires and abilities: “What we need here is a revolution of self-perception. (...) If you have never had it, self-respect has to be learned” (1996: 133). However, the utopian view that in the discourse of true democracy everyone should speak in the first person singular and advocate their own attitudes and interests negates the *raison d’être* of the fundamental feminist idea that those who have access to the political, cultural and scholarly life of a community, i.e. to international forums, should represent those who belong to (due to historical and social circumstances) this absent, silenced, and non-individualized subaltern:

Some commentators appear to draw the conclusion from these horrible conflicts that only a liberal individualist conception of the polity is legitimate. The mistake is to give groups any political recognition at all. People should look on themselves as individuals, simply human beings, and should look on others this way as well. The degree of attachment that people have to group identities makes such a response utopian. As I discussed earlier, it presumes an abstract and voluntarist conception of the self (Young, 1993: 142).

Phenomena relating nationalism and Eurocentrism as the two main European biases are observed critically from the alternating perspectives of a narrow kitchen and a panoramic gaze of a frequent flyer. Such a gaze is stipulated by the discourse which favors a *view in between* – marginal by experience, central by an ability to identify such experience as generally relevant. The critical positioning belongs to the expected mental makeup of an engaged, ideologically sensible post-communist writer (among whom excels Milan Kundera) and theoreticians (Slavoj Žižek, who has no equal). Therefore, the critical position of Croatian women writers is the condition and the result of their newly achieved status within the discursive field of power, to whose political, social and humanitarian incongruity they point. Their gendered perspective also appears as doubly legitimate, being able to transgress the confronted European economic, political and cultural poles and supposed local narrow-mindedness while, due to its feminist orientation, able to profit cognitively, combining a universal viewpoint with particular case studies. Thus, Drakulić’s “brave” capturing of the *storytelling right* (as Amy Shuman would put it) – in the name of her allegedly representative socialist experience – could be also interpreted as an ignorant Westerner’s negation of the ethnic, religious, cultural and social differences of more than 100 million women in post-communist Europe:

Why, then have I used 'we' and 'us' so frequently in this book? Because a common denominator is still discernible, and still connects us all, often against our will. It is not only our communist past, but also the way we would like to escape from it, the direction in which we want to go. It's our longing for Europe and all that it stands for. Or, rather, what we imagine Europe stands for. I believe you can see this common denominator if you take a close look at the price of bananas, at our bad teeth and public toilets, or at our yards on the outskirts of big cities (Drakulić, 1996: 4).

## COMPLEX IDENTITY AND COMPLICATIONS WITH IDENTITY

(...) so the frighteningly numerous migrations caused by the collapse of the communist system and the war are bringing into being new people, cultural mutants, 'wossies' (...) Those who unite in themselves the traumatic *Wessie* and *Ossie* genes. They do not respect their forebears. They belong to a new tribe of people *of no fixed abode*. They feel most natural in an aeroplane. They are hard to recognise because they are good at mimicry. Their skill is the skill of humiliation, their achievement is mental, personal freedom. If nothing else, they have won the freedom not to blame anyone for their own loss. Mutants have sharpened sight and hearing. They are sceptical, deprived of rights, they possess nothing, they are sub-tenants. (...) They do not consider Europe a privilege. Their privilege is the loss of illusions (Ugrešić, 1998a: 249-50).

The problem of identity represents one of the key points of the mutual support of the postmodern anthropological and feminist viewpoints. The opinion that we should not speak about identity but rather about identification (as the process whereby identity constantly emerges, shifts, and is negotiated) is considered to be a commonplace in each of the two complementary and frequently unified discourses. While the notion that gender, race, class and profession are only cultural constructs and the source of identity representations enjoys a certain consensus, a significant difference arises between particular theoretical orientations according to the emphasis they place on either the role of the body (experience, subjectivity, direct contact) or the role of discourse (cultural constructs, socialization, communication) in the formation of an identity. Judith Butler, an influential feminist theoretician, sees identities as complex and transformable products of the network of conflicting "discursive regimes" which regulate a particular culture, while proponents of the anthropology of experience point at lived experience as an important and immanent part of subjectivity, orienting a person according to or against prevailing cultural understandings and social agendas. They see identities as discursive and historically articulated *frames of experiences, judgment and action*, but personal experience still remains the central, unpredictable and partially unemancipated force which fills them with content from within. While in the first sense, identity does not emerge from free choice, but rather from the state of already-being-

addressed by the Other to which we merely respond, in the second sense a lived experience, especially the so-called *border* experiences, are seen as the blind spot resisting discursive interpretations. This is why the anthropology of experience finds its real challenge in identifying those conditions, elements of habitué, which in each particular case induce or prevent individuals from recognizing themselves in particular identity marks.

Terms commonly used in interpretation (such as *construction, invention, fictionalization, transgression*) are in self-identification discourses frequently confronted by the “counter speech” about relentless fate, the painful tattoo of life on one’s own skin, harsh reality as a wall through which one unsuccessfully tries to pass. These rhetorical figures clearly represent domains of life experience which language finds hard to reach. Similarly, the post-modern affinity for a shifting, fluid, mixed and marginal identity, whose components are susceptible to an unlimited number of new combinations and to adjust to every new socio-cultural context, has been subjected to criticism. Enthusiastic acceptance of an idea of marginal (social) identity, hybrid (sexual, racial or ethnic) and border (geopolitical or psychological) identity as an identity which will contribute to the “correct” self-awareness and social affirmation of the subject is, however, frequently incompatible with the self-evaluation of such identities, particularly in the case of socially marginalized individuals. People who belong to minority groups, immigrants and refugees usually do not see their position as an advantage for integration in a multicultural society and a starting point for building a “philosophical” superstructure, but rather as an obstacle to the faster integration (of their children) into the new environment.

In this sense, the discourse of dissident Croatian writers unjustly glorifies the spiritual, moral and cognitive advantages of those voluntary exiles who opposed the pressures of national identification and established for themselves the only legitimate identity, that of post-Yugoslavs – multicultural and ethnically tolerant – by recycling their memories of life in socialist Yugoslavia. But, the very insistence on the intensity, consensual meaning and obsessiveness of these memories – whose substance is not directly linked with the recent war – is, in Ugrešić’s work, not consistent with her theory that Yugoslav experience means a token of final political maturity and pragmatism (that of voluntary exiles), evident in their skepticism towards utopian ideas of the new world order and Europe’s bright future of unification: “if nothing else they have won the freedom not to blame anyone for their own loss (...) They do not consider Europe a privilege. Their privilege is the loss of illusions” (Ugrešić, 1998a: 25). But, it seems that the same sense of disappointment is shared by most people living in the ex-Yugoslavia, disappointment arising from the lack of real political solidarity which has forever marred the (still) attractive image of a Europe characterized by abundance, open borders and equal opportunities offered by liberal capitalism. Whereas the condemnation of Gulag, Stalinism, and censorship resulted in the political

solidarity of the dissidents and the improvement of human rights in the West, the condemnation of “Balkan” nationalism resulted only in revulsion at cultural “incompatibility” and the “regression” of those resorting to the “arguments of arms”.<sup>11</sup>

Ugrešić, following Maria Todorova (1997), contributes new material which will show that ambivalence of impression, positive and negative evaluation, essentialist and fluid differentiations, simultaneous attraction to the Balkans and rejection of it, are components of a permanent process of self-identification among Europeans, which set the parameters of “compatible difference”:

my problem consists of the fact that I am not and do not wish to be different. My difference and my identity are doggedly determined by others. Those at *home* and these *outside* (...) Here, alongside my occupation, writer, they never fail to put that designation, Croatian (Ugrešić, 1998: 237).

But, despite her realization that, in the Europe of today, a political and national component still determines the official framework of identification for each individual (especially the one seeking political asylum, a work permit, citizenship, refugee status), the author believes that the greatest trauma of ex-Yugoslav exiles, not just those from nationally mixed marriages, lies in the fact that shortly before the war they were being urged to declare unambiguously their national identity. On the other hand, the *identity crises* that the majority of exiles supposedly suffer from, soon becomes a “metaphysical” advantage and for the author represents a big step towards transgression of known identities. Consequently, a former Yugoslav “recipe” for effective multiculturalism is projected onto *new people, cultural mutants, “wossies”* that owe their success in the West to harsh experience, capabilities, skills, youth, and “immunity” against ethnic divisions and loyalties:

(..) those who unite in themselves the traumatic *Wessie* and *Ossie* genes. They do not respect their forebears. They belong to a new tribe of people of no fixed abode. They feel most natural in an airplane (Ugrešić, 1998a: 250).

The “mutant” with hybrid cultural identity and of *no fixed* abode is an ideal construct of a permanently dislocated post-modern subject who has had no place to return to after the Western theoretical discourse abandoned its anthropocentric position, that is, according to Vilem Flusser, after a man discovered that *he is not a tree* and that *human dignity lies in the fact that there are no roots*. According to a popular postmodern belief, the intellectual’s moral obligation is to reflect

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fragrant and cleaner world” (Ugrešić, 1998: 173-4).

<sup>11</sup> “It was us, the Eastern Europeans, who invented ‘Europe’, constructed it, dreamed about it, called upon it. This Europe is a myth created by us, not only Bosnians, but other Eastern Europeans too – unfortunate outsiders, poor relatives, the infantile nations of our continent. Europe was built by those of us living on the edges, because it is only from there that you would have the need to imagine something like ‘Europe’ to save you from your

the experience of the margin, of border spaces whatever they might represent – “space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary” (hooks 1991:149) – because it is believed that a view from the side and from afar can offer better and sharper insight into what goes on in the center- *mutants have sharpened sight and hearing* (Ugresišć, 1998a:25).

But, while *mutant* intellectuals and writers owe their success to their intellectual superiority, in the case of more “down to earth” strategies of survival, many exiles suffered from the complex of being over-educated and have to make compromises and big efforts towards accommodation. So, instead of seeing a homogenous community of immigrants or individuals in Diaspora inclined to commodification, we should look to their distinctive differences and incongruencies:<sup>12</sup>

In distinguishing, for example, affluent Asian business families living in North America from creative writers, academic theorists, and destitute ‘boat people’ of Khmers fleeing genocide, one sees clearly that degrees of diasporic alienation, the mix of coercion and freedom in cultural (dis)identification, and the pain of loss and displacement are highly relative. Diaspora experiences and discourses are entangled, never clear of commodification. (Nor is commodification their only outcome.) (Clifford, 1997: 257-8).

By emphasizing only the similar emotional burden of exile (rootlessness, grief, homesickness) – be it among forced or voluntary exiles, people who have only been “bruised” by the war, and people who carry the burden of the death of their loved ones or have been subjected to torture – we neglect significant social differences between people who pursue their careers and people who rely on welfare or the low wages of manual labor. By doing so, we ignore important breakdowns, anxieties and personal tragedies which follow more or less the postcolonial position of Yugoslav exiles lacking a good education, whose experience differs from those of highly educated dissidents or members of the Diaspora. Daša Drndić, who in 1995 as a correspondent for Canadian CBC radio interviewed a number of her compatriots, destroys the myth of a promising new beginning when writing about people suffering from the complex of being over educated and over qualified from the perspective of Canadian emigration policy. Drndić stresses that one can find ever fewer “tragic and sensationalistic” elements in exiles’ personal accounts, and ever more rational, depressed reflections on their own destiny in the “promised” land:

*Boris’s story:* Yes, the war broke out and we were, in a way, forced to leave, but, after all, it was our decision (...) *David’s story:* We came to Canada to start a new life and we thought, after a while, we would become part of the middle class. Ha! But this is an

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complexes, insecurities and fears” (Drakulić, 1996: 212).

<sup>12</sup> This is what colleague Maja Povrzanović is trying to do, investigating communication, forms of collaboration, mutual prejudices and important differences in the concept of national identity between Croatians in Diaspora

obsolete concept. Because the middle class is becoming extinct. (...) *Enes's story*: I think that many people are wrong when they try to find a job in their line of work. I think we have to change our trade. We must make a living by taking jobs that are in demand, that Canada needs. Canada needs electricians, bakers, plumbers, truck drivers. (...) *David's story*: In my case, age is a handicap. I am pushing fifty. If I were not, I'd still have some hope. They have certain requirements here that newcomers have to meet. They have to have Canadian references and Canadian experience. (...) Predictions are gloomy. Sometimes, we ask ourselves why we have come here, why have Canadian authorities let us in, why do they import so many people. The conclusion sounds almost Marxist: they need cheap labor. *Boris's story*: The latest problem is that the stream of my thoughts is getting gradually narrower. It does not matter if you work as a delivery man, taxi driver or a construction worker, because, eventually, you become what you do, a delivery man, a taxi driver, a construction worker. How shall I put it, you have to make your thoughts more simple. *Vesna's story*: I used to work as a social worker and I distributed welfare. Now they are giving me welfare (...) The future depends on my strength to do hard labor. I work like an animal (...) The first thing a landlady of a big house asked me was if I had any Canadian experience. I asked her in which part might that Canadian experience be needed, cleaning or living? (Drndić, 1998: 18-27; my translation)

Croatian ethnographers have discussed on several occasions the discursive strategies which writers such as Rada Iveković, Slavenka Drakulić and Dubravka Ugrešić used in writing their own feelings of hybrid identity, their lack of a fixed abode and their own account of being political exiles into, on one side, a “shared” drama of all Yugoslav refugees, displaced persons and emigrants, and, on the other side, into the matrix of post-modern theoretical discourses of identity and exile (see Prica, 1995; Velčić-Canivez, 1996; Prica and Povrzanović 1996; Jambrešić Kirin 1996a; Jambrešić Kirin and Povrzanović, 1996: 3-19). This method of *misdescribing* the hardships of the “real” refugee situation – which writers usually condemn when applied by Croatian politicians, intellectuals, and scholars – in the manner of an autobiographically suggestive “verification analogy” is best illustrated by a fragment from *Das ABC des Exiles*, which is omitted from the Croatian and English editions of *The Culture of Lies* :

Ich bin funfundvierzig Jahre alt und habe kaum Illusionen. Ich bin eine von etwa vier Millionen Ex-Jugoslawen, eine aus dem Stamm, dessen Mitglieder heute ueber die ganze Weltkarte verstreut sind. Ich bin eine *Obdachlose, Heimatlose, Exilantin, ein Fluechtling, ein Nomade*, alles auf einmal, eine Person mit dem Pass eines neuen europaeischen Kleinstaats (Ugrešić, 1995: 297).

By emphasizing the possibility of choosing between (ethnic) identities and identities outside ethnicity, choosing between identity and non-identity – associated with the image of a cosmopolitan nomad – Ugrešić disregards the impact of the wartime policy of violently imprinting identity (in the case of subjects of ethnic victimization and rape) on the formation of individual and collective identities:

Although I now have Croatian citizenship, when someone asks me who I am I repeat my mother's words: "I don't know who I am any more..." Sometimes I say: "I am a post-Yugoslav, a Gypsy" (1998a: 7).<sup>13</sup>

Authors of highly esteemed autobiographical accounts of the disadvantages, challenges and advantages of exile have intentionally written their reflections into the literary history of exile. They find spiritual congruencies and moral satisfaction in selected quotes from Kiš, Krleža, Brodsky, Michnik, Kundera, Schklowski, and Said, but also in a middle-class family tradition in which women "always said that one buys gold so one could eat it in the future" (Drndić, 1997: 91). Although the narrative modes and styles of Croatian writers and publicists differ considerably, the prevailing autobiographical strategies help them to give the impression that certain opinions and evaluations are politically more correct and ideologically more neutral because they are presented as a part of simulated or actual confidential conversations between the author and her close friend, relative, or acquaintance. Skillful sliding of autobiographical discourse instances between first person singular and plural makes it possible to establish an emphatic identification with the people who suffered most, without regard for crucial differences in existential status which, for many, deny the freedom of choice to be or not to be an exile or immigrant, to return, or go *home* occasionally:

With no firm ground beneath my feet I stood at the centre of the city realizing that this was what being a refugee meant, seeing the content of your life slowly leaking out, as if from a broken vessel (...) But at that moment, *at the thought of becoming an exile*, I understood that it would take me another lifetime to find my place in a foreign world and that I simply didn't have one to spare. (Drakulić 1993:33-4; italics by R.J.K.)

What anthropologists take issue with in this kind of emphatic reflection is the neglect of the fact that clearly separates the writer in temporary exile from the mass of anonymous, unfortunate people who (while they also do not have "an another lifetime") do not have the opportunity to choose between returning home to Zagreb or staying in Ljubljana.<sup>14</sup> They are not denying writers the right to sympathize and identify with the historical and life experiences of others, and they do not claim that only refugees can understand the experience of exile, nor that only rape victims can understand other rape victims, but they demand the full

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and Croatian and Bosnian refugees in Sweden.

<sup>13</sup> "Da ich weder namen noch Identitaet mehr habe, kann ich vielleicht nur noch Muslimin sein. Oder eine Sioux, oder eine Eskimofrau (...) Ich spaziere durch Paris, und es freut mich wirklich, nichts vom Angebotenen, nichts vom Auferlegten sein zu muessen. Ich kann ganz einfach Spaziergaenger sein in dieser gastfreundlichen, warmen Stadt. Ein Staatenloser (apatride)" (Iveković 1993:10-11).

<sup>14</sup> Drakulić often demonstrates deep emotional involvement and an ability to identify with the feelings of suffering people, which contributes to the accuracy of her description, although provoking some moral dilemmas. In her essay *Interview* she depicts none of the crucial differences, but suggests that something more important connects her with the interviewee, a rape victim now settled in a refugee camp in Karlovac. At first glance there was nothing "except that we were women, which, I admit, seemed insufficient. However, the resistance I felt (...) some light nausea and uneasiness (...) All that connected me with this woman even before I met her. Most



responsibility for the consequences of every policy of representation, the policy within which numerous anonymous components of the pronoun we do not have any real influence on our method of representation, as writers and ethnographers, of *shared feelings*, experience, fears and hopes. In their articles, they tried to suggest the legitimacy of that understanding of exile which does not see the situation of becoming a stateless and “homeless” person as a situation which “gained dignity” and provided a space of unlimited possibilities for “cultural mutants”, but as a situation of existential uncertainty, economic dependence or discrimination never before encountered, as the psychological problem of the loss of one’s spiritual and cultural foothold or as the decision of voluntary sacrifice for the benefit of children.

### THE IDIOMATIC AND PUBLIC VOICE OF SUFFERING

Female writers, particularly Ugrešić, bore witness to various forms of appropriation, manipulation, and disposition of someone else’s adversity as “a kind of pornography of suffering” taking into consideration the fact that “the authentic account of an anonymous victim has far greater human and literary value” (1998a: 171) than artistic documents on war, but also warning us that the domestic political as well as the Western cultural scene imposed on writers and intellectuals the rigid role of “a reporter of reality”:

(...) like it or not, he becomes a reporter of reality (which he had never been, because he was not a journalist, but a writer): like it or not, he becomes a new kind of tourist guide, an ethno-writer (something that had never entered his life). All in all, he becomes a kind of interpreter, psychologist, anthropologist, sociologist, political analyst, ethnologist – in other words, a translator of his own reality and the reality of his own country into a language comprehensible to West European readers. He feels caught in a trap which he had so far managed to avoid, in a system abounding in traps (Ugrešić, 1998a: 169).

Mixed feelings and an ambivalent view of common socialist history among those who have stayed and those who have gone into exile is a commonplace of post-Yugoslav dissident literature. Caught up in the trap of such ambivalent images and thoughts, enraptured by the “native” cosmopolitanism of post-Yugoslav exiles, their multilinguism and incredible mimicry verging on non-identity, Ugrešić writes with the same ardor about their endemic inarticulateness, the predominance of their gestures over verbal language in interpersonal communication:

I see my mother tongue as the effort of an invalid who lavishly supports any, even the simplest, thought with gestures, intonations and sighs. All of a sudden conversations between my compatriots seem to be long, exhausting, on no particular subject matter, as

if they wrap each other with sticky, sound saliva, as if they tap each other with words, chat lamely. (...) is it possible – with a language which hasn't learned how to depict reality, despite the complexity of inward experience of reality – to do anything, for instance, write literature (Ugrešić, 1998b: 111, my translation).

There, again, seems to operate a colonial logic which considers the languages of “the natives” incapable for abstract, rational, scientific thinking, while insufficient oral communication is an obvious sign of a “civilization without history”. In a way, the author views her compatriots as a community of infantile subjects incapable of coping with the “master” history which puts their lives at stake and deprives them of being subjects in it, of being able to speak on it.

However, a totalizing policy of representation, i.e. of the intrusion of the strong divisions and clear guidelines present in nationalist patriarchal discourse seems to be repeated in some women writers' texts where is “no place for the profane, the dubious, the doubting, or the simply confused – into which categories most of the population (...) probably fall” (Stubbs, 1998: 6.3) and in which women are most often viewed as objects, not subjects of nationalist discourse. The legitimate and astute critique of war-induced mental and emotional changes was mostly restricted to the observation of the power and range of influence of the nationalist ideology via the media and public discourse. On the other side, on the basis of recorded accounts of displaced persons, relatives, acquaintances, people who were forced to flee, whose life changed overnight, Croatian ethnologists, folklorists and ethnomusicologists have tried to identify the importance of the intersubjective exchange of lived experience as the field of dilemmas, moral temptations, contradictory attitudes, and doubts about the correctness of official policy or the sense of one's previous life. Rather unintentionally they came across the basic anthropological question of inscribing personal experience onto the social, local and familial domains, i.e. looking for, as Paul Gilroy once formulated, “a way of conceptualizing the fragile communicative relationships across time and space” which bring a personal and family or community history to a close encounter in spite of so much accentuated media influence (cf. Jambrešić Kirin, 1996b). The unexpected connection and disconnection, especially inside refugee camps, affiliations and broken friendships, the urge to take a side, the existential drive to redefine the notion of home in a situation “where displacement appears increasingly to be the norm” and “staying (or making) home can be a political act, a form of resistance” (Clifford, 1997: 84-5), the urge to forget in order to survive, to start a new life or to give up easy, to stay or to flee abroad, have emerged as ethnographic priorities in situations where fieldwork turned into “homework”.<sup>15</sup> We have in mind here an intensified emotional and communicative space in

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of all it was fear”. (1997: 147, my translation).

<sup>15</sup> Ethnologist Ines Prica expressed the tragic paradox produced by the inverted wartime situation for scholars who are expected to conduct fieldwork among local and, most often, rural populations, and to do that in a

which “a kind of ‘thickening’ of experience in Geertz’ terms” took place, in which imposed radical social and existential disjunctions have been producing “new choices and restrictions on the choice between different identities and identifications” (Stubbs, 1996: 7):

Of all, conditionally called, war themes, this ‘refugee’ one has, maybe more than the others, sharpened the gap between the, as it appeared this time, so very irreconcilable, poles of the moral and the scientific. Between an almost cynical choice that from distressed human being an anonymous teller is made (...), and an equally bad choice of silent compassion and scientific escapism, I think we have still found a dignified and prolific form of communication (...) which is here, to great extent, an exchange within equalized positions, sometimes simply a mutual consolation (Prica, 1993: 177).

Supporting the idea of a *multivoiced ethnography of war*<sup>16</sup> guided not by the assumption of voiceless victims but by the desire to provide storytelling right for the whole range of people with different experiences, attitudes and backgrounds, we tried to cut the Gordian knot of linguistic and psychological impediments “since the morally imperative endeavor to represent the body in pain is confounded by the unrepresentability of the pain that it seeks to represent” (Butler, 1997: 6). We did not accept the claim that every recorded attempt to entice someone into verbally articulating his or her painful experience is only an act of “misdescribing war” and a method of empowering the “regime’s fiction of power” (cf. Scarry 1985). We were also suspicious of the artistic notion of truth implicit in the powerful rhetorical devices and images in the context of which a single act of violence could represent an “unusually exact metaphor of post-Yugoslav everyday life”, in the sense that people all over the former Yugoslavia “were astonishingly ready to accept their own dehumanization” (Ugrešić, 1998a: 255-6). The accuracy of the portrayal of a particular community in a particular period depends on one’s rhetorical skills but also on the ethnographer’s commitment to documenting and encompassing myriad close encounters with members of the community.<sup>17</sup>

Ethnographers faced the problems of negative reception of their writings

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contextualizing manner, that is, in situations in which inhabitants of ethnically mixed regions along the Croatian border were forced into exile in Zagreb and other towns: “Without their land and animals, they [peasants] are the biggest victims of the ‘loss of context’, left again in an out-of-identity space: either under the sad refugee aegis, or as unwilling (and inadequate) mark-bearers of a belonging-nowhere peasant culture. Caught between the sentiment towards *the folk*, *traditional* and the odiousness towards the peasant, cattle-raising, Vlachian, mountainous, they do not manage to board even such a slow and all-offering train as the one of national identity is” (1993: 63-4).

<sup>16</sup> Following the anthropological project of *writing culture*, Croatian ethnologists declared themselves as the new ethnographers and advocated the idea of a multivoiced ethnography where all the registered and chosen, as well as silenced, voices are, if not equally treated, than at least equally pointed out. But, their doubts as to whether a verbal modus can altogether bring an immediate reality or individual trajectory closer to us places a part of this epistemological burden on readers, warning them that all texts are the sites of potential interpretative conflicts. At the same time the broader public still expects moving, trustworthy, unpretentious and simple portrayals of the confusing realities of war given through the looking glass of a sensible individual and a critical intellectual who is expected to reinforce people’s trust in universal values such as democracy, solidarity, and human rights.

<sup>17</sup> “How was I, in any case to explain the inexplicable endeavor to float beyond established discourses, just to remain human and sensitive to explicative aberrations which so easily switched concepts to their own

by people with radically different views,<sup>18</sup> the danger of reproducing in the field power-relationships, the necessity of reexamining stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity in folklore scholarship, and the desire for new criteria for the selection of informants among the interviewer's educated, urban contemporaries (cf. Povrzanović, 1997). They made comments on the mutually replaceable roles and unrecognized potential of ethnological knowledge; for example, some besieged citizens of Vukovar profited from knowledge of primitive eating habits gained from an anthropological TV documentary, while domestic ethnologists helped those returning to war devastated villages reconstruct some of their material folklore and invigorate old embroidering techniques, songs and dances. Although suspicious of anthropological strategies of rapport and advocacy, and of a reflexivity which excludes political in favor of epistemological guarantees of achieving authenticity and truth, domestic ethnographers are still looking for an ethical relationship towards "the language in which we are subjects and in which we subject each other", for "a discourse that carries within itself the critique of its own language" (Chambers, 1996: 10-11), for a discourse in which more and more space would be given over to the accounts of ordinary people, the silent majority accompanying any great historical event. The metaphor of the *embodied* voice, as opposed to a *speculative* discourse, implies the act of listening and recognizing someone's will to share with us his or her most disturbing thoughts and feelings, an attempt to negotiate, to interact, to contextualize, to oppose the "cultural anesthesia" of a society which tried to canalize, to make neutral and aseptic the experience of pain, always potentially subversive, accumulated in the community of sufferers.

It is a common trait of both the writer and the anthropologist that their work cannot be accomplished by intellectual procedures and abstract thinking without the utilization of "a cluster of *embodied* dispositions and practices". Most distinguished representatives of both discourses are set apart by an ability to present their personal view of the world in a way that provokes thought and transgresses prevailing codes, genres, prejudices and interpretative patterns. This is twice as true when it comes to writing imbued with a feminist awareness of the Western phalocratic logocentrism which associated woman's experience with ephemeral, private, less important parts of life and the world. Following this kind of thinking, empathy and a readiness to negotiate or make a compromise were

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purpose of defining and thus controlling, including here eventual preconceptions and rigid frameworks of my audience?" Cale Feldman, 1995: 80).

In any case (...) his [Croatian writer's] message is certainly read differently by those in the trenches, those on one side and those on the other, those without a roof and those with a roof over their heads, those who are hungry and those who have enough to eat, those who have experienced the new-style concentration camps and those who have only seen pictures of war on television (Ugrešić, 1998: 87).

<sup>18</sup> In any case (...) his [Croatian writer's] message is certainly read differently by those in the trenches, those on one side and those on the other, those without a roof and those with a roof over their heads, those who are hungry and those who have enough to eat, those who have experienced the new-style concentration camps and those who have only seen pictures of war on television (Ugresic, 1998: 87).

also considered less important, while women who contested public opinion and moral consensus always incurred the risk of community condemnation. The same initial question is still equally relevant:

Autobiography can, of course, be quite 'sociological'; it can move systematically between personal experience and general concerns. A certain degree of autobiography is now widely accepted as relevant to self-critical projects of cultural analysis. But how much? (Clifford, 1997: 88).

This text has hopefully helped to draw the fragile generic boundary between ethnographic and creative writings on war and single out some important differences between the two. Yet the process of constituting the ethnographer's or literary narrator's authority has shown that the expression of personal experience is as important as the intellectual ability to cope with the complex processes of emotional, social and "metaphysical" adaptation to a condition which lies somewhere between former relative security and a still-unaccustomed displacement in a local world of global change.

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the accuracy of Croatian women's ethnographic and literary portrayal of war experiences depends upon the ability to "translate" the war-induced personal and collective tragedies and impediments into general postmodern theoretical concerns. Whereas both discourses incorporate verbal traces of lived encounters with violence, pain and disillusion, as well as the dispute over the possibility of representing *voiceless* victims, they offer different viewpoints on postmodernist concepts of identity, hybridity, rootlessness, trauma, and the "storytelling right" based on the embodied voice of pain. Women writers and publicists combined feminist and socio-political critiques to observe critically nationalism and Eurocentrism as the main European biases from, intermittently, a narrow kitchen and a panoramic all-encompassing gaze. Croatian women ethnographers, on the other hand, embraced a multivoiced ethnography of war based on the assumption that the experience of extraordinary suffering could and should articulate its idiomatic and potentially subversive public voice. The aim of Croatian ethnographers of war was to demonstrate how testimonial literature and the war writings of ordinary people could help to democratize the historiographic discourse and establish an image of the Croatian nation forged through war suffering, solidarity and resistance the consensual cultural value of which reaches far beyond its misuse within the dominant national narrative.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel geht der Frage nach, in welcher Weise die Genauigkeit der Darstellung von Kriegserfahrungen durch kroatische Ethnologinnen und Schriftstellerinnen auf der Fähigkeit beruht, die kriegsbedingten individuellen und kollektiven Tragödien und Schwierigkeiten in allgemeine postmoderne theoretische Belange zu "übersetzen". Obwohl beide Diskurse verbale Spuren von Gewalt, Schmerz und Desillusionierungserlebnissen und Auseinandersetzungen über die Möglichkeit einer Darstellung "stumme" Opfer einschließen, bieten sie doch verschiedene Standpunkte postmodernistischer Auffassungen von Identität, hybridem Ich, Wurzellosigkeit, Trauma und dem "Erzählrecht", das auf der verkörperten Stimme des Schmerzes beruht. Schriftstellerinnen und Publizistinnen kombinierten feministische und sozialpolitische Kritik, um Nationalismus und Eurozentrismus als die europäischen Hauptvorurteile abwechselnd mit engem Küchenblick und umfassendem Rundblick kritisch zu beobachten. Kroatische Ethnologinnen hingegen machten sich eine vielstimmige Ethnographie des Krieges zu eigen, der die Ansicht zugrundeliegt, daß die Erfahrung außerordentlichen Leidens mit der

ihm eigenen und potentiell subversiven Stimme öffentlich zum Ausdruck gebracht werden kann und soll. Das Ziel kroatischer Ethnographen des Krieges war zu zeigen, wie die Literatur von Zeugen und die Kriegsberichte eifacher Menschen zur Demokratisierung des historiographischen Diskurses und zur Schaffung eines Bildes der kroatischen Nation beitragen können, das durch Kriegsleiden, Solidarität und Widerstand entstanden ist und dessen allgemein akzeptierter kultureller Wert weit über den Mißbrauch innerhalb des dominanten nationalen Erzählens hinausreicht.

## RESUMO

Este artigo discute em que medida o rigor da descrição etnográfica e literária das experiências de guerra das mulheres croatas depende da capacidade de “traduzir” as tragédias e condicionamentos pessoais e colectivos causados pela guerra em preocupações teóricas pós-modernas mais gerais. Enquanto ambos os discursos incorporam vestígios verbais de encontros com a violência, a dor e a desilusão, assim como a disputa sobre a possibilidade de representar as vítimas *sem voz*, esses dois discursos oferecem diferentes pontos de vista sobre os conceitos pós-modernos de identidade, hibridez, desenraizamento, trauma, e o “direito de contar” baseado na voz da dor individualizada. Escritoras e jornalistas combinaram críticas feministas e socio-políticas a fim de identificar o nacionalismo e o eurocentrismo como os principais preconceitos europeus, como quem olha, intermitentemente, uma pequena cozinha e um panorama abrangente. As etnógrafas croatas, por outro lado, abraçaram uma etnografia de guerra pluri-vocal baseada na assunção de que a experiência desse extraordinário sofrimento podia e devia articular a sua voz pública própria e potencialmente subversiva. O objectivo das etnógrafas de guerra croatas foi demonstrar como a literatura testemunhal e as escritas sobre a guerra da gente comum podiam ajudar a democratizar o discurso historiográfico e a estabelecer uma imagem da nação croata forjada através do sofrimento da guerra, da solidariedade e da resistência, cujo valor cultural consensual vai muito mais além do mau uso que dele se fez no âmbito do discurso nacional dominante.