

FROM CONVICTION TO HEROISM

THE CASE OF A CROATIAN WAR GENERAL

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In 2001, Ante Gotovina, one of the Croatian generals in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, was prosecuted by the ICTY for war crimes committed during the last operation by the Croatian Army, Operation Storm. During his flee, imprisonment and later release we can trace different shifts and splits in Croatian society and popular culture that are closely linked with sovereignty and national identity.

Keywords: *nationalism, sovereignty, war, hajduk, outlaw, popular culture*

Leta 2001 je bila objavljena obtožnica proti generalu Anteju Gotovini, vojaškem generalu Hrvatske vojske zaradi zločinov, storjenih med in po akciji Nevihta. Med begom, zaporom in poznejšo izpustitvijo iz zapora je mogoče zaslediti različne premike in razpoke v hrvaški družbi in popularni kulturi, ki so tesno povezani z vprašanji suverenosti in nacionalne identitete.

Ključne besede: *nacionalizem, suverenost, vojna, hajduk, popularna kultura*

In 2001, Ante Gotovina, one of the Croatian generals in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, was prosecuted by the ICTY for war crimes committed during the last operation by the Croatian Army, Operation Storm. Before that time, General Gotovina was just one among many generals in the war, not particularly prominent in public discourse about the war. However, the indictment made him an almost mythical person and, for a number of Croats, a symbol of the Croatian nation. Instead of going to the ICTY for trial, Gotovina fled and hid for the next four years, until the Spanish police captured him in the Canary Islands. While he was a fugitive, various civil organizations openly supported him with huge public billboards and the popular slogan “A hero, not a criminal!” However, this billboard with its huge photo of Gotovina was not only addressed to the ICTY, but also to at least three Croatian governments that were trying to capture and extradite him. In that sense, Gotovina became a symbol of a deeper split in Croatian society that took shape in the post-socialist transition. This slogan that was so popular among Gotovina’s supporters demands closer examination. The conjunction between hero and criminal cannot be interpreted merely as a way to establish a difference between these two attributes. One should ask how exactly these two attributes came to be paired. In other words, is there always some chance that a criminal can become a hero, and a hero a criminal?

To answer these questions, I propose two paths of argumentation that will join at the end to produce an interpretation that I expect to make it possible to understand the broader

social, political, and cultural context of Croatia's transition and national self-representation. One of these paths will be to understand how Gotovina became a symbol of a social divide, and another will be to identify the specific discourse that was constructed around Gotovina.

HAJDUKS, OUTLAWS, AND FREEDOM FIGHTER

It is interesting that before Gotovina fled there was no good candidate for a national hero of the last war. This is strange for the country that had a considerable number of “people’s heroes” from the Second World War. These Partisan soldiers earned the medal of People’s Hero due to extremely brave action or for organizing uprisings against foreign armies and local collaborators. Under socialism in Yugoslavia there were 1,322 holders of People’s Hero medals; 955 of them were killed in combat during the war, or after the war in operations to capturing remaining collaborating forces. No such medal of honor was established in Croatia, although various organizations of war veterans repeatedly asked for one. Even in public discourse and the media, there were no stories from the war that emphasized the role of individual fighters. The narration of the war was always structured around the personal pronoun *we*. None of the soldiers became a symbol of the war, not one of them was even manipulated for the purpose of embodying the wished-for national character—and then everything changed almost overnight. The ICTY accused generals Gotovina, Ivan Čermak, and Mladen Markač of war crimes committed by Croatian forces in Operation Storm. Together with them, the indictment charged former President Franjo Tuđman and Minister of Defense Gojko Šušak, but both of them died before the indictment was made public. This was the first indictment against Croats from Croatia. Until then, the accused had only been Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina; some of them, such as army officer Tihomir Blaškić, have been released, others are already in prisons around Europe, and some of them are in the middle of the process at the ICTY. Unlike Markač and Čermak, Gotovina fled and nobody knew where he was. He did not contact the media, family, relatives, or friends; he simply disappeared and produced awkward silence. His disappearance became top news all around the world and soon different stories started to be told about it. Simultaneously, the Croatian government was constantly suspected of helping Gotovina escape and even actively supporting his hiding. Carla del Ponte, the chief prosecutor of the ICTY at the time, placed strong legal and political pressure on the Croatian government asking for active participation in capturing Gotovina. Of course, the political establishment in Croatia officially fully backed the ICTY demands, but at the same time many people in Croatia, and even part of the administration, were not satisfied with such collaboration by the government. The mainstream press and media supported the ICTY policy demanding that Gotovina be brought to justice, producing even more disagreement in society. Many people found themselves betrayed through such media representation because they thought that even the indictment was unjust and baseless, and that Gotovina’s decision not to turn himself in to the court was right. In their opinion, the media should have defended

Gotovina in the name of “truth, justice, and national pride.” Moreover, people¹ perceived this indictment not as an indictment of Gotovina, but of Croatia as such. Suddenly, the lack of representation of individual soldiers in the war changed. Many citizens found themselves targeted by the indictment, especially those involved in combat operations. This was most obvious in the reaction of people after the first ICTY ruling that found Gotovina guilty and charged him with a twenty-year prison sentence. People interviewed on the main square and streets of Zagreb stated that they also felt like war criminals. Gotovina became an identification symbol for Croatian citizens.

Gotovina’s escape and hiding triggered one specific ambiguous discourse already present in Croatian society. It is a historical discourse constructed around the *hajduk*, or outlaw, during Ottoman times that choose to live by plundering caravans and the nobility. Considering that this nobility was more or less equivalent to the Ottomans, in the folklore of the Balkans the *hajduk* often represents the first freedom fighter. Epic poems were written around his deeds and often sung to the accompaniment of the folk instrument known as the *gusle*.² In his book *Flag on the Mountain*, Ivo Žanić took folklore motifs about the *hajduks* from epic poetry and tried to recognize them in the political narrative of the early 1990s. For Žanić, epic poetry and the *hajduks* work as a matrix that is deeply rooted in culture and evoked in times of uncertainty. The end of the socialist era evoked epic poems especially from Serbian folklore in order to evoke analogy of their contents with current times, or to help understand contemporary events. The book is filled with examples in which Serbian and Montenegrin politicians use this evocation mechanism to gain public support for specific causes (mobilization for the war, approval of the war, internal political fights, etc.). All of this could be understood as cultural preparation for the war and even for the atrocities that took place in it. However, discourse on the *hajduks* was initially employed differently by Croatian political discourse. Žanić gives the example of the political speech of Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and Prime Minister Stipe Mesić after the blockade of roads in parts of Croatia where Serbs were the majority population in the summer of 1991. Among other attributes describing the action of Serb paramilitary actions, both of them used term “road *hajduks*” and related this term, as Mesić said to “something that is called terrorism in international law” (Žanić, 2007: 87). Initially, the *hajduk* was understood as an opponent of law and order, and in that manner the Croatian government took the position of Venetian, Austrian, or even Ottoman rule in the epic imaginary—or, in Žanić words, “Croats speak as they would read Ottoman’s, Venetian’s, Austrian’s or Dubrovnik’s state archives, where *hajduks* are cruel plunders, sometimes mercenaries, generally outcasts that do not recognize any human law” (Žanić 2007: 115). Evocation of international law by Mesić made this position even stronger. This is not strange if one takes into account that during first year of the war in Croatia the most popular song was “Stop the War in Croatia,” a title that was addressed to the European Union. In the song, Croatia is

¹ According to polls after the arrest, two-thirds of Croatians thought that it was bad news for Croatia.

² The *gusle* is a one-stringed instrument played with a simple bow. The melody is restricted to a few tones that serve as an accompaniment to the storyteller’s singing.

represented as peaceful entity whose only desire is to become “one of the Europe stars,” as the lyrics go. In such an ideological constellation, *hajduks* functioned as a remnant of the Balkan past, something that is also part of Serbian tradition, not European tradition. However, it did not take long for the *hajduk* to start changing its position in the local Croatian public and political imaginary. The reasons for this should be traced in another ambivalent position of the *hajduk* as not just a rebel against foreign rule, but also as a fighter against the specific class position of the rulers regardless of whether they were of foreign origin or not. An anecdote from the early 1990s about President Tuđman and his close associate Ivan Milas sheds more light on the issue. During a visit to Miljana Castle³ near the border with Slovenia, Franjo Tuđman sarcastically asked Ivan Milas “Do you have castles like this in Imotski, or in the Dalmatian countryside?” “No,” replied Milas, “But we also don’t have any serfs!”⁴ What Tuđman was trying to say is that the Croatian south is less civilized due to the lack of impact of western civilization (which is also reflected in the architectural legacy). Milas, on the other hand, replied evoking the fact that civilization was always brought to the Balkans through colonization and social injustice. To be civilized in the Balkans often also meant complete submission to foreign rulers⁵ or even becoming a foreigner; to conceal or even disavow belonging to local culture (by changing one’s habits, dress, and eating customs, and by learning a foreign language). Thus, if they did not have any noblemen or castles, that means that they preserved their freedom. In that manner, class relations were always conceived through ethnic categories and, of course, the other way around. The ambivalence of the *hajduk* was thus created on the same axis. As soon as he chose to live outside the system, as a roadside thief, he became a freedom fighter, no matter how extreme his deeds were and what motivations he had. It has to be noted that the *hajduk* could be understood as a specific reflection of the inherited ambivalence of the concept “people” that was noted by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer*: “It is as if what we call ‘people’ were in reality not a unitary subject but dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles: on the one hand, the set of the People as a whole political body, and on the other, the subset of the people as fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies” (Agamben 1998: 177).⁶

Thus, although official politics in Croatia took a stand against any evocation of the positive matrix of the *hajduk*, it appeared that tradition was not lost. Fertile ground for such a matrix of the *hajduk* was established from different origins during the war. One was a difference in the interpretation of the combat between official and unofficial sources. In the context of the war, people found it difficult to understand some decisions by the political establishment.⁷

³ Miljana Castle was founded by the Ratkay noble family (of Hungarian origin) in the sixteenth century. It was built in the Renaissance and Baroque styles from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

⁴ Ivan Milas’ son-in-law told me this anecdote.

⁵ For a long time, German and Italian served as a denominator of the class position of the speaker. Remnants of this division are still recognizable in the use of distorted German words in northern Croatian cities (including Zagreb) in everyday life as a sign of difference between “authentic” families and newcomers.

⁶ Interestingly, Antun Radić, the founder of Croatian ethnology, also mentioned two articulations of the people in his programmatic text for doing fieldwork and ethnography. In an effort to construct the object of ethnography, he would say that the focus of ethnography is people—the lowest stratum of our people.

⁷ The first one was the decision not to attack Yugoslav Army compounds on Croatian territory during the

Soldiers that were active in combat often had their own version of events that were different from those presented by the press and television. Thus, around every action in war, whether it was successful or not, unofficial stories and narratives were produced that focused on the betrayal of soldiers due to hidden negotiations with the enemy or international political actors. One that still occupies people's imagination is the battle for the Croatian town of Vukovar.⁸ Many people still believe that Vukovar was not properly defended and that it was sacrificed for political goals (such as international acknowledgement of Croatia). In the same set of narratives, one could also include privatization of huge industrial facilities that occurred during the war. Some people bought factories for a very low price thanks to political connections, whereas others were killed on the front lines. Moreover, the factories soon went into bankruptcy and were then sold as real estate. Those that survived the war did not have jobs and suddenly became poor and underprivileged, creating disappointment, despair, and a sense of helplessness. Ambivalence, suspicion, and distrust were addressed to every prominent public figure and every institution. Due to this kind of popular conceptualization of society, any public figure would trigger a counter-narrative that constructed a conspiracy theory of her or his deeds and reasons why he or she became part of media coverage at the specific moment. This is one reason why there were no national heroes. In her book *Cruel Optimism*, Laurent Berlant introduced the concept of an intimate public that is produced through "establishing in the public sphere an affective register of belonging to inhabit when there are few adequate normative institutions to fall back on, rest in or return to" (Berlant 2009). If one employs this concept for the context produced by the war and the tradition mentioned earlier, one can see a split in the values that were promoted by official politics and those that were produced by deprived citizens. In such a context, Gotovina's flight, his disappearance from public discourse, and most importantly his silence made him part of the affective register suggested by Berlant: sort of a new institution to rely on. In the empty space that was left, people filled their fantasies and found signifiers and reasons for their shortcomings and deprivation. The entire folklore inventory about the *hajduks* appeared again. Gotovina became a *hajduk* that stood up against the oppressors of the people: politicians, entrepreneurs, and foreign institutions. The epic of the *hajduks* as righteous fighters against all sort of injustice was employed again, although now in a different form. At a 2002 concert, when Gotovina was still hiding, Marko Perković Thompson, a controversial Croatian rock musician that promotes nationalism (some would even say Nazism) in his music, symbolically left two seats empty in the audience: one for General Mirko Norac, in prison and accused of organizing the killings of 100 civilians in Gospić, and another for Gotovina. Thompson dedicated one song to Gotovina entitled "Far

short war in Slovenia. Although the compounds were not properly defended and many soldiers were in Slovenia, President Tuđman did not accept the advice of his military consultant Martin Špegelj to attack the poorly defended Yugoslav Army barracks and seize the arms that were still there.

⁸ Vukovar is a Croatian town on the bank of the Danube River, the border between Serbia and Croatia. There was major combat when outnumbered Croatian soldiers defended the town street by street for more than two months. The town itself suffered extreme damage due to heavy artillery fire and aerial bombing.

Away behind Nine Villages (Daleko, daleko iza devet sela.)” In the beginning of the song the subject is calling his relatives: “Do you hear me / When I call you, my relatives. (Čuješ li me kako, dozivam te rode)” As the term for ‘relatives’ Thompson uses *rode*, which designates kinship but can also be more broadly related to the entire nation. In Slovenian, for example, the word *rojak* from the same root still refers to a member of the same nation. Thus he promotes a specific view of the nation as set of people related to each other, almost like kinship. The call can then be interpreted as addressed to the entire nation. The subject calls them to come to a faraway land and describes how to get there (“Don’t go left at the crossroad / Nobody goes there/ Everybody is afraid of the beast. / Nemoj ići lijevo na križanju staze. Tu ne ide niko svi se zvijeri paze.”) At the end the people (of course, if they take the right path and listen to the advice of mythical fairies) will come to a faraway native land. One can thus understand the faraway land as a lost core of national identity and pride that has to be (re)discovered. He portrayed the path to the land behind nine villages, and at the end of the chorus the land itself is depicted as populated with “wolves, fairies, and *hajduks*.” *Hajduk* returns as a national symbol, and the slogan “A hero, not a criminal” related to Gotovina should be understood as referring to a proper Croat, and not to foreigners or their serfs.

GOTOVINA’S OTHER BODY

However, this is only part of the story. What Žanić did not employ in his interpretation is the broader discourse-shift process that occurred in the West that includes the same type of ambivalence. In his book *Discipline and Punishment*, Michel Foucault connects the ambivalence of the convict with Kantorowicz’s theory of the king’s two bodies. For Foucault, the torture that took place in pre-modern times originated from the idea that any crime is an offence to the sovereign and thus the convict is placed at war with that power. This sovereignty was related to the king’s other body, the sacred body that represented the political theology of the time. This sublime body represents a specific thing that is occupied by the specific person and that does not die after the death of the person. Public torture and decapitation was one occasion when that sovereign body could represent itself in a detailed ritual: “The public execution, then, has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted” (Foucault 1995: 48). The appearance of the sovereign king’s body opens the possibility for people not just to support him as in a war, but also a possibility to stand against him. Thus, public torture was also dangerous for the sovereign because the convict could spread discontentment in the crowd. However, it was not just that the appearance of the signifier of sovereignty produces this ambivalence. It was already inscribed in the sovereignty itself. A symptom of that internal ambivalence is literature, often published by the legal system, about the convict’s last words or stories about his crimes. Instead of simply spreading propaganda about the horrors of various crimes, that literature also provides sanctification of the perpetrators or, in the words of Foucault, they “may be read as two-sided discourse, in

the fact that they relate, in the effects they give to these facts and in the glory they confer on those ‘illustrious’ criminals, and no doubt in words they use” (Foucault 1995: 68). A sublime part of *hajduk* identity could be understood as the relation to the king’s sublime body. In the *hajduk*’s deeds he almost magically transfers some of king’s sanctity. Somehow a part of the king’s sovereign body becomes part of the convict and criminal identity, no matter whether he felt guilty on the scaffolds or persisted in his outlaw identity. In this way, he is always partly a criminal and partly a hero.⁹ A further conclusion would be that the *hajduk* is somehow related to sacred king’s body, to its sovereignty, and that the end of specific political theology (which Foucault brilliantly explained in his works) would also result in the banishment of the *hajduk* from popular imagination. Recently Eric L. Santner published the book *Royal Remains*, in which he tried to identify the remnants of this sacred body in different social settings—a sort of, as he puts it, “modern afterlives of the king’s body.” Through numerous insights, Santner shows that royal remains should be found in the specific emptiness that is left after the king’s sublime body has disappeared. A gap is produced that calls for closure. However, this gap is of a specific kind. It is not just emptiness, some point that can be fixed. It is a structural disjoint, loss, or in the words of Santner: “Paradoxically, in order to experience the loss *as* loss – and to enter the space of the ‘as’ more generally—we must ‘lose’ or ‘miss’ something along the way” (Santner 2012: 73). Such missing could well be seen in the postcolonial world, in which “authenticity,” “tradition,” and “nativity” became words for such a miss. Before colonial contact, life was reflected inside a specific discourse, and at the point of colonial contact the people became disjoined from that discourse and gained a position to see it from outside. Thus the loss is precolonial discourse that cannot be obtained any longer or, in other words, precolonial subjectivity is lost forever. This lost entity functions as a Lacanian phallus—a signifier of difference, something that enables signifying but does not have any fixed meaning (Lacan 2006).

An example of such a loss could also be seen in the articulation of the nation, as the transition from a *Gemeinschaft* to a *Gesellschaft*. The Indian historian Partha Chatterjee (1993) noticed how the process of constructing a nation differed in the postcolonial world and in that respect cannot be equally interpreted for every situation. The process of nation-building in the Balkans was also specific in that way. Because this case is not exactly postcolonial, Michael Herzfeld has defined it as crypto-colonial; that is, “the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models” (Herzfeld 2002: 900–901). This situation produces paradoxes, Herzfeld continues, of marking one part of a nation at the same time the heart of the nation and retaining primitives that should be civilized. One example of this mechanism is eastern European ethnology before the Second World War, which was a specific discourse that tried to preserve peasants in world of ancient traditions as those that had a direct relation to ethnic identity

⁹ This could also be understood as a reflection of specific discourse in which opposition is already inscribed in the discourse itself.

but, on the other hand, did not perceive them as equal. In such an undetermined situation, the nation itself acquires an ambiguous shape, as a form of *Gesellschaft* that should shelter the lost *Gemeinschaft* by employing a variety of discursive mechanisms. What happened in crypto-colonial societies is comparable to problems that can occur in process of castration (at least in the sense in which Lacan uses the concept). Castration works as separation of subject from the enjoyment, as in the aforementioned loss of some former structure (former discourse or, in the case of constructing a nation-state, *Gemeinschaft*). However, this loss does not merely imply deprivation: “Castration is this very cut into the supposedly immediate link between the subject (or the body) and enjoyment, yet a cut that comes in the form of additional ‘appendix enjoyment’; it refers to a gap that separates body, from within, from its enjoyment and at the same time binds it to it” (Zupančić 2008: 191–192). National enjoyment is thus a product of constructing an appendix of enjoyment, something that comes into a place of difference. In crypto-colonial societies, the castration cut did not occur in a proper way. Instead of constructing the appendix enjoyment, a cut in the crypto-colonial society is denied, continually producing trust in the immediate link between the subject and national enjoyment. Although castration occurred in reality, there are subjects that completely repudiate it. The “name of the father,” the instance responsible for producing castration (in the broadest sense the symbolic, language, etc.) is foreclosed. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this opens place for psychosis. Due to lack of the master signifier, its place is filled through a Lacanian Real in forms of hallucination. This hallucination comes from a primordial, dead father that strives for resurrection through which a specific unmediated *jouissance* could be obtained, or from the place where “fairies, wolves, and *hajduks* live.” The disappearance of Gotovina opened a place where the royal remains or sublime king’s body could be reestablished through its counterpart convict or outlaw, who will bring back the forbidden national *jouissance* or “Nation-Thing.”¹⁰ Instead of experiencing the “loss as loss,” society tried to build a political theology that would again be established in the presence of the king’s other body.

Returning to the representation of the *hajduk*, this same loss or emptiness can be found in the narrative itself. Most of the epic poems about *hajduks* are stories of the failure of the main character. The *hajduk* always fails to accomplish his task, due to betrayal or enemies that were too strong. Thus the *hajduk* works as a strong symbol that represents incompleteness, a strange emptiness that is left after his life. This emptiness is of the same sort as the one employed by the nationalists in the Balkans to work as a “Nation-Cause.” The *hajduk* gives a promise that completeness is possible and that society can work as a homogenous, corporal entity. On the other hand the *hajduk* can be perceived as a demand from the past, almost an

¹⁰ The concept of the “Nation-Thing” is used to depict loss as loss in nationalistic discourse. It is used by Spivak (2010) in postcolonial theory and by Žižek (1993) in theoretical psychoanalysis. Although there are some differences in usage of the term, what is essential is the emergence of the “Nation-Thing” as a central empty space that the community perceives as the cause of belonging. The authors mentioned above interpret this perceived the other way around, claiming that the “Nation-Thing” is an effect of the pursuit of a cause to provide a solid foundation for the community and nation.

“infinite demand,”¹¹ which puts ethical pressure on the nationalist subject to fight the battle from the past. However, the closure of Gotovina’s case shows how loss can never be fulfilled, even if the “battle is won.”

THE RETURN OF THE KING’S BODY

On November 16th, 2012 the streets of the cities and villages in Croatia were filled with people. Everybody was waiting for the verdict of the ICTY after Gotovina’s lawyers’ appeal. Huge screens were set up on the squares with live coverage from the courtroom in the Hague. The church even organized public prayers. And then the judges released Gotovina. Enormous joy spread through the streets, people started to hug each other, and all of them felt relieved. My very good friend came to my apartment late in the evening, after he had celebrated for hours with friends from his platoon and said: “The war is finally over!” He was not the only one to use this sentence to interpret the news of the release; many other people also used it in short reports in the media. It appeared that the “intimate public” had finally obtained a signifier, some institution that could represent them. However, it would be misleading to think that suddenly everybody thought that the ICTY was a righteous body of international law. The interpretation was in fact the opposite. The popular song “They Judge Me,” written by Miroslav Škoro and performed in a duet with Thompson, could shed light on the way in which the release of Gotovina was interpreted. This is song written in the manner of a letter that prisoner is sending to his beloved. The chorus of the song is an important one: “They judge me because I love my own / That what I love the most, and because I defended / What’s most precious for me / Foes judge me, my love / But they don’t know that the truth / is deep water.” The video accompanying the song clearly indicated that it is referring to indicted Croats detained in the Hague. The term *foe* refers to two things: one is the ICTY and the other is betrayal from home (at the end of the first stanza there is the verse “and since brothers betrayed me”). The song offers a narrative about enemies that judge the subject and at the same time are incapable of understanding the truth. In line with the topic of the song, many people in Croatia perceived Gotovina’s release as a victory over the ICTY. In other words, for nationalists, the verdict of release was not the result of a long and detailed process in the courtroom, but of the high morality of the Croatian actions during the war. They understood it that not even enemies (the ICTY, local traitors, liberals, etc.) could find a stain on their wartime actions, even though they desperately looked for it. Gotovina became a signifier of the “Nation-Thing,” of the strange lost king’s other body, as Santner would term it. Paradoxically, one of Gotovina’s enemies from the war, Serbian General Šljivančanin accused of

¹¹ *Infinitely Demanding* is a book by Simon Critchley in which he tries to establish a new approach to ethics through an impossible demand on an ethical subject whose only escape is to subvert such a demand through an understanding of the incompleteness of the self: “the experience of conscience is that of an essentially divided self, an originally inauthentic humorous self that can never attain the autarchy of self-mastery” (Critchley 2007: 11).

atrocities committed in Vukovar,¹² publicly congratulated Gotovina on his release and with this act shocked Serbian citizens.¹³ A few days later (on November 22nd) he explained his act in a short interview for the Serbian TV show “Yes, Maybe, No” in these words: “Because they succeed in defeating that court with the help of their country, that court that doesn’t like us, especially it doesn’t like me and my country.” The source of this statement is not just solidarity that was established between former prisoners, otherwise it would not be public. What General Šljivančanin had in mind was something that paradoxically unites former enemies in Balkan wars. What they recognize as a unifying category is the possibility of entering national enjoyment by defeating the forces that try to prevent it. Such an attitude can be interpreted as a product of a specific way of absorbing modernity in the Balkans (as mentioned earlier). Thus communism (as one possible route to modernity) and the international community of today (as a force that runs the transition of eastern Europe) play the same role in the discourse of nationalists in all Balkan countries; the role of enemies that have to be won in order to open the direct path to the “Nation-Thing,” or truth in “deep waters.” Or, in the words of Slavoj Žižek: “The desire at work in this symptomatic substitution of Communism for capitalism is desire for capitalism cum *Gemeinschaft*, a desire for capitalism without the ‘alienated’ civil society, without formal external relations between individuals” (1993: 206).

Gotovina thus gained a specific status of a sublime object of the “Nation-Thing,” the promise of direct access to national enjoyment. For the “silent majority,” Gotovina became “clear as a tear,” as the Croatian proverb goes. Therefore the sense of the closure can be understood as a symbolic end of the war and a possibility for official celebration of the war memory, especially Operation Storm. The individual biographies could thus be inscribed in the national narrative about the past and obtain broader significance. Also, of course, many war criminals now felt that they had been released from possible convictions and indictment.

Contrary to the common expectation, Gotovina’s return was not a climax of nationalist rhetoric. Although many people gathered on the main square in Zagreb waiting for their hero to celebrate with them, they were left disappointed. When Gotovina stood up on the stage people started to shout, “To the battle, to the battle for one’s people!”¹⁴ and sing “Just call us, just call us / All the hawks will die for you!” expecting a victory speech. However, Gotovina was calm and said, “This is a final point. War belongs to history. Let’s turn ourselves toward the future. All of us.” Then he expressed his appreciation to the state administration, to the president and the prime minister, for their support (which provoked an immense objection

¹² After the battle, more than 200 Croatian soldiers and civilian prisoners were taken from the local hospital (many of them wounded) and deported or killed by Serbian forces after the town was occupied in November 1991.

¹³ Gotovina’s release resulted in mass disappointment in Serbia. During and after Operation Storm, more than 220,000 Serbian citizens fled Croatia, and many those that stayed in their homes were killed. Most people in Serbia believed that ethnic cleansing was legitimated through Gotovina’s release.

¹⁴ This motto is based on a verse from an opera by Ivan Zajc (a nineteenth-century national composer), “to the battle, to the battle,” and the extension “for one’s people” was later added during the war. Today it is mainly used by supporters of the national soccer team.

from the crowd). People tried to call him back but, after his colleague from prison, General Markač, gave his speech, Gotovina simply left the stage. Soon he disappeared from public life, newspapers, magazines, and broadcast networks. He started a small tuna business and people say that he considers himself a former general that is now a fisherman.

This was Gotovina's second disappearance. He left, consciously or not, a void and that produced a strange effect. The billboards with Gotovina's portrait that were installed during his imprisonment and flight were left untouched, giving flesh to the lost king's body, to the "Nation-Thing." In the Croatian nationalists' imaginary, it is this second Gotovina that represent their truth; his sublime sovereign body stands for them all. Instead of the expected *jouissance*, deferment of enjoyment took place, giving the possibility for nationalists to find another enemy that would be accused of theft of the promised national enjoyment, producing the "Nation Cause" through it all over again. Just a year later, through the NGO "In the Name of Family" the "silent majority" organized a successful referendum that prohibited homosexual marriages in the constitution. The concept of tradition (most often in alignment with marriage, family values, education, etc.) came back into public discourse as an entity that should be protected in order to restore disintegrated society. If one wants to employ psychoanalytic terminology again, the castration mark of society was hidden by the billboard with Gotovina's portrait, and thus denied. The enemy of tradition and authenticity is thus merely a symptom of that denial.

CONCLUSION

Although the return of Gotovina was the end of the war in the nationalist narrative, the billboards with his face that still stand untouched around the country show that there is still some social emptiness left even with the return of the supposed hero. His voluntary retreat from public life shows that he could not bear the symbolic mandate that was inscribed on him. It would be impossible for any person to permanently act as a national hero, under the constant pressure of public expectation. On the other hand, Gotovina's speech on the main square in Zagreb did not meet the demands of the crowd. It seems that even if the *hajduk* accomplishes his tasks there is still no closure of the "infinite demand." Thus Gotovina remained split between his actual and sublime body represented on the billboards. In that way the "Nation-Thing," the promise of completeness, can be still operational in society.

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OD OPTUŽBE DO HEROIZMA: SLUČAJ HRVATSKOG RATNOG GENERALA

Godine 2001. objavljena je optužnica protiv generala Ante Gotovine, ratnog generala Hrvatske vojske zbog zločina počinjenih tijekom i nakon akcije Oluja kojom je službena Hrvatska vlast uspostavila kontrolu nad dijelom teritorija koji je od 1991. godine bio u rukama pobunjenih građana Srpske nacionalnosti. Tijekom i nakon akcije sa tog prostora izbjeglo je preko 200.000 ljudi u samo nekoliko dana u strahu za vlastiti život. Zločini koji su se dogodili tijekom i nakon akcije nisu bili procesuirani od strane hrvatskog sudstva pa je Sud za ratne zločine u bivšoj Jugoslaviji pozorno skupljao dokaze nakon akcije te na kraju podigao optužnicu protiv trojice generala: Ante Gotovine, Mladena Markača i Ivana Čermaka. No, prije nego li je hrvatska vlast uspjela uhiti Gotovinu i predati ga sudu u Hagu on je pobjegao i time stvorio od sebe simbol koji je ukazao na traumatičnu podjelu Hrvatskog društva. Jedan je dio građana iskazao bezrezervnu podršku Gotovininom bjegu dok je drugi optužio njegovo ponašanje kao nelegalno i opasno. Svrstavanje na jednu ili drugu stranu bilo je praćeno visokom emotivnom investicijom i označavalo dublji jaz unutar hrvatskog društva proizvedenog tranzicijskim i postsocijalističkim stanjem.

Jedan od najvažnijih slogana građana koji su podržavali Gotovinin bjeg bio je «Heroj, a ne zločinac» koji se pojavljuje sa Gotovininom fotografijom na nizu plakata na području cijele Hrvatske. Ovaj tekst kreće upravo od tog slogana pokušavajući protumačiti ambivalenciju odnosa heroj/zločinac. S jedne strane način konstrukcije Gotovine kao heroja za jedan dio građana bio je povezan sa hajdučkom tradicijom koja je sama po sebi ambivalentna te s jedne strane (one službene) doživljava hajduka kao razbojnika, no s druge strane, s obzirom da su vlasti na Balkanu sve do kraja prvog svjetskog rata bile strane sile, i kao borca za slobodu. Ivo

Žanić u svojoj knjizi *Flag on the Mountain* pokazao je do koje je mjere hajdučka epika bila sredstvom pomoću kojeg su narodi na Balkanu mobilizirali mase i objašnjavali im novu političku situaciju. No ovdje se pokušava ići i korak dalja prateći Foucaultovu tezu suverenosti. Naime za Foucaulta je kralj podvojena osoba sa dva tijela (teza koju uzima od Kantorowitza), jedno je njegovo fizičko tijelo, a drugo suvereno. Upravo ovo drugo tijelo tijekom 19. stoljeća nestaje i nema neku izravnu zamjenu. Ono ostaje tek znak razlike. Raznovrsnim postupcima društva pokušavaju popuniti taj ostatak, a najčešće se on ostvaruje kao Nacija-Stvar neki skriveni oblik veze koji identificira svakog pripadnika nacije. Gotovina ukoliko se analizira kroz taj dvojaki izraz suvereniteta otvorio je svojim bjegom vlastitu dvostruku artikulaciju, kao lice s plakata i kao fizička osoba. Gotovina s plakata je tako postao privremeno suvereno tijelo oko kojeg se nacionalistički dio hrvatskog društva grupirao. Gotovinin povratak nakon oslobađajuće presude nije međutim ukinuo njegovo sublimno tijelo. Unatoč povratku i danas se diljem Hrvatske mogu vidjeti plakati na kojima je Gotovinin portret. On se u potpunosti odvojio od svog fizičkog nositelja i funkcionira kao oznaka za nemoguću Naciju –Stvar.

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