

HIDDEN DIALOGUES WITH THE PAST: CINEMA AND MEMORY OF THE 'HOMELAND WAR'

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution. This dissertation contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Tamara Kolarić
31st December 2018

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyses the relationship between fiction films and collective memory in Croatia specifically related to the memory of the ‘Homeland War’ – the armed conflict which took place in the country between 1991 and 1995. The analysis is based on the films produced in the period between 2001 and 2014.

While literature on post-Yugoslav cinema is abundant, little has been written about the role films play – or have the potential to play – in shaping collective memory. Inspired by the adverse reactions fiction films frequently caused in public, this dissertation started from the following question: what was it that these films “do” – or were perceived to do – to the story of the war? This was then broken down into two research questions: as a point of departure, I looked into whether the war was present in contemporary Croatian cinema, i.e. whether films offered material with regard to the war. Further, if the war was present, how was it addressed – a question that required probing for a suitable explanatory framework. A theoretical framework was built on the literature on collective memory, enabling me to observe the filmic texts as potential artefacts of cultural memory, which offer narrative interventions into the dominant memory narrative of the ‘Homeland War’. A further assumption was made regarding the nature of this dominant narrative: in the heavily memory-saturated environment of contemporary Croatia, the story of the war developed by political officials during the war evolved into a narrative of political memory through active production, media control and occasional use of force to silence dissonant narratives. This then also became a schematic narrative template for shaping further memory of the war – thus mostly excluding dissonant stories from national memory.

To answer the first question, thematic analysis was conducted on a preliminary data body, including all feature fiction films made in the period between 2001 and 2014 that were produced, or majority co-produced in Croatia. The ‘Homeland War’ was identified as a prominent topic appearing in four different ways, thus constituting the second data body, consisting of four groups of films in which the war was present as a topic (major, minor, background or silent).

In the second stage of analysis, I explored the dialogical relations between films dealing with the war and the dominant memory narrative (in its extrapolated core/narrative template form), observing the different strategies films take in their responses. In doing so, and to understand the film-memory dynamic, I adapted Bakhtin’s concept of hidden dialogicality as read by Wertsch (2002). Through the analysis, the dissertation found three groups of films with regard to their strategies of engaging with the dominant memory narrative. First, *films dealing with the past*, which dialogically challenge the dominant narrative, reject it through failed polyphony or trauma-silence, or affirm the dominant narrative. Second, *films bypassing the past* by focusing on the present, depoliticizing and challenging the dominant narrative limitedly. Finally, *films assuming the past*, which provide cues for a particular war narrative to be “written in,” thus maintaining or subverting the dominant narrative.

These findings cast a new light on how fiction films in Croatia address the ‘Homeland War’, enhancing the understanding of the role films play – or can play – in shaping collective memory, and vice versa. This opens the way for future research with regard to both cinema and memory, but also narrativity and memory more generally. It also reveals the need for a more systematic understanding of relationship between narratives and memory in post-war context, not just from the perspective of cultural or memory studies, but political science as well.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 1991, following the first democratic elections after decades of Communist rule, Croatia declared independence. Yet the process of transition to democracy was quickly intersected with an armed conflict. Responding to the declarative nationalism of the new ruling party, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (HDZ),¹ the Serb minority on the country's territory rebelled and proclaimed its own independence, refusing to live under the newly elected government. With both sides fueling nationalism and repressing opposition, escalation did not take long. The conflict, at various time periods classified as an act of aggression and a civil war (Žunec, 2007), lasted until 1995, when it was brought to an end through two military operations, *Bljesak* (Flash) and *Oluja* (Storm). It found closure in 1998, with the peaceful reintegration of the secluded territories.

During the war, the country was governed by HDZ, a party built around its leader and first president, Franjo Tuđman. A former Yugoslav army general-turned-dissident and a trained historian, Tuđman became renowned for his tendency towards authoritarian rule – enabled partly through newly-adopted constitutional provisions, which created a system that was formally semi-presidential, yet in some ways worked as a superpresidential one.² He placed special emphasis on uniting all Croats (at home and away, the diaspora) around the goal of national independence. This included making the war a central point in national identity-building. The conflict, which took on the name ‘Homeland War,’³ was heavily narrativized already as it was ongoing. The military successes, as well as human losses, became central

¹ English: Croatian Democratic Union.

² On the regime change, characteristics of the Tuđman regime, elections and the process of democratization in Croatia in the 1990s, see Boduszynski, 2010; Kasapović, 2001; Lalović, 2000; Zakošek, 2002. On the effects of “superpresidentialism” see S. Šurina, 2017.

³ The term 'Homeland War' was eventually confirmed through a parliamentary declaration. As I will discuss in Chapter III, the name is very suggestive, implying a particular normative interpretation of the war. To avoid subscribing to this interpretation, I use single quotation marks throughout this thesis to both point to the conceptualization behind the term, and to distance myself from this implied meaning.

stories of HDZ-s political campaigning – evolving into a narrative of glorious victory and the fulfilment of a 1000-year old dream of a Croatian nation-state. After the conflict ended, its retelling remained a staple in public discourse, now shifted from describing the present to remembering the past – and becoming collective (political) memory.

Collective memory of the ‘Homeland War’ in the post-war period is the central concern of this dissertation. I explore how a specific medium, namely fiction film, engaged in the process of (re)negotiating this memory. Specifically, I look at the kinds of narratives feature fiction cinema presents in response to the memory narrative roughly sketched above. The motivation for this project came out from observing an unusual, repetitive phenomenon: while since the breakup of Yugoslavia Croatian cinema has not enjoyed particular popularity among the viewers,⁴ frequently there have been cases in which specific films or authors would be called out in public for their attacks on the ‘Homeland War.’ Often, these attacks would be initiated by veterans’ associations. Sometimes they would receive support from prominent political figures – thus involving individuals with far more power than the relatively small filmmaking community, and with a significantly larger outreach than the films in question. The comments were often similar, involving various version of the claim that the film in question offended the sanctity of the ‘Homeland War’. Two things became obvious from these instances. One, there was a ‘Homeland War’ story those staging the uproar were operating with: the accusers, the media and the general public could all agree on this story without much explanation. Two, despite there being a narrative that the institutions and the public appeared to agree on, the challenge from these films – regardless how small in circulation – was taken seriously: films were perceived to be “doing” something to the narrative of the war that was not to be ignored.

⁴ This is best reflected in low cinema viewership statistics for domestic films, although many films reach a significantly larger audience on TV channels. Only one Croatian film since independence has had over 300 000 viewers – the 1996 comedy *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku* (*How the war started on my island*) – and only rare films have been seen by more than 100 000 viewers (in a country of just over 4 million people). Not all films produced achieve theatrical distribution. On some reasons for low popularity, see Maloča, 2018.

This research was thus borne out of the question: *what was it that these films “do” – or were perceived to do - to the story of the war that was so important?* Literature on collective memory became indispensable to answer this question, for it enabled me to understand how it is possible that there was a silent agreement on the war in society – a shared memory narrative – as well as why these films were seen as so challenging. Films, this dissertation argues, created and offered narratives which, under certain circumstances, can become part of collective memory. This memory – similarly to individual memories – is not simply completed in the past and recalled (repeated) in the present. Rather, narratives of collective memory are permanent reconstructions of the past from the present, providing basis for group identity and legitimizing it at a given time. This dependence on the present also means memory narratives are changeable, as they are not the ultimate story of the past, but versions that can be rewritten. It was precisely this that made cinema cause so much uproar: there is a permanent insecurity over the narrative of the war, which is porous and changeable as any other. In addition, the ‘Homeland War’ itself is specific in that, while over 20 years have passed since it ended, the memory of it is still “unfinished” in the sense that it includes interaction of various formats of memory. The memory of the ‘Homeland War’ can be described as lived memory, political memory (A. Assmann, 2010), postmemory (Hirsch, 1992, 2008, 2012), and cultural memory residing in mnemonic products (Olick, 2008b) at the same time, which makes it especially open to negotiation and contestation.

The above outlined setup will be unpacked further in chapters to come. Here, it suffices to say that it is the film narratives that this dissertation takes an interest in. That interest is twofold, captured in two research questions. As a point of departure, I ask *whether the war is present in contemporary Croatian cinema* – whether film offers some interesting material with regard to remembering the war. Further, if the war is present, the question becomes: *how is war addressed in contemporary Croatian cinema?* The latter question is a relational one: it is not

simply about the kinds of stories films tell about the war but, more importantly, about the ways these stories resonate with other memory stories – or specifically with the dominant narrative.

In responding to these questions, I make an additional assumption, namely that these films are created in an environment saturated with a particular narrative of the war – what I call the dominant narrative. The dominant narrative can be summed-up as follows: a representation of the war as an aggression by a stronger opponent which is then overturned by a courageous, “good” fight. This narrative was, as I will discuss in Chapter III, developed already during the war, and has been shaping memory of it since. The films discussed here are, in terms of their impact on memory, thus best understood when observed in a process of *hidden dialogicality* (explained below) with this dominant narrative in its various incarnations.

Some conceptual clarifications are necessary here. The meaning of collective memory – and specifically cultural memory, the memory format films strive to contribute to – as well as narrative and Croatian fiction film need to be explained before a note on methodology is offered, all of which will be elaborated further in the upcoming chapters.

1.1 Theoretical clarifications and situating the work within a wider context

Under feature fiction films, this dissertation understands feature-length (60+ minutes) films that tell fictional or fictionalized stories. The analysis includes films made in the period between 2001 and 2014. The starting year was selected following political changes in 2000, which saw HDZ replaced by a left-leaning coalition, opening doors to possible negotiations of the war narrative, as well as to loosening the direct state control over film production through slowly introducing a new system of funding and regulation (Kurelec, 2012; Turković & Majcen, 2001).

Significant scholarly literature has been written on the topic of post-1990 film production in Croatia, mostly within a wider, “post-Yugoslav” or “Balkan” perspective. Most of those studies have – explicitly or implicitly, as their main focus or a side-issue – dealt with the way films have processed and (re)produced ideologies since the 1990s (e.g. Goulding, 2003;

Iordanova, 2001; Levi, 2007; Pavičić, 2010, 2011b, 2011a; Šošić, 2009; Vidan, 2011, 2018; Zvijer, 2015). The present study follows the lead of those authors looking at the connection between film and society. Yet it pushes that idea further. First, rather than keeping with the tradition of studying post-Yugoslav national cinemas comparatively or thematically across state borders, it focuses solely on the fiction film production in Croatia. Second, it does not observe Croatian films through deep reading of individual works, as most mentioned works have done; instead, I search for patterns in ways of responding to the dominant narrative – what I call different *strategies* of responding, and thus of dealing with the past events. The assumption here is that there is more to be understood about the interplay between film and society (and memory) if overall production is taken into consideration, rather than focusing on individual examples of war-focused films. Third, I focus here neither on ideology, nor on style (or genre etc.) as the dominant feature, but rather look at both style and ideology as a part of the strategies of dialogical responding. This study combines film-scholarly work on post-war Croatian cinema and that of political science and memory with a focus on the specifically filmic ways of storytelling, the contextual meaning of those told stories and the political implications of them being told (in that specific way). This dissertation thus strives to offer a contribution to three streams of literature: literature on memory, on cinema in post-war Croatia and on understanding issues of politics and identity in the country.

Fourth, I look at films specifically with regard to collective memory, a concept that has been used relatively rarely in analyses of post-Yugoslav film thus far (see e.g. Daković, 2008b; D. Jelača, 2016). As elaborated in Chapter II, the focus is here, however, not solely on films that “make” memory, but also on those that have that potential, expanding the usual approach to the film-memory relationship. Finally, I look at the time period between 2001 and 2014, which has relatively rarely been in focus of analysis when it comes to cinema and politics in the region, especially when compared to the frequently studied 1990-2000 era. The end year

was chosen based on the possibility to acquire all (or near-all) films produced in the given period. This does not mean that the battles over memory are finished, but that a work of research and writing must set for itself a finite boundary in order to be completed.

To understand the way film analysis was done, the concept of cultural (collective) memory is crucial. The term *cultural memory* implies at least two meanings. One, it is used to cover the whole of collective memory studies. This is, for example, the route taken by Astrid Erll in her own definition of cultural memory as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts” – a definition broad enough to include anything from individual acts of remembering in various social contexts to specific studies of group, national or transnational memories (Erll, 2008a, p. 2). Two, and more specifically, the term cultural memory relates to Aleida and Jan Assmann’s conceptualization of it as “a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to those people a collective, that is, cultural, identity”, and that is also “exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms,” thus different from communicative memory. (J. Assmann, 2008, p. 110). Mediation is the key word here: collective memory is mediated through cultural means: speech, text, print as tools, as well as specific formats utilizing those tools, such as novels, political speeches or films. Aleida Assmann further differentiates cultural memory from individual memory, social memory, as well as political memory, all based on criteria of “extension in space and time, size of group, and volatility or stability” (A. Assmann, 2010, see also 2006).⁵ It will suffice here to say that in this distinction, cultural memory is a long-duration “layer” of memory situated between the remembrance of individuals’ shared life experiences and the more formally structured and top-down created political memory. Unlike political memory with its ties to official power, cultural memory can emerge from various sources: practices, events, structures,

⁵ Assmann does not imply that individual memories are free of collective influence and independent of them. Rather, they too are constructed interactively rather than in isolation. One could claim that the difference between the four frames is thus more one of range between the individual and the collective.

norms, and actors using different tools of mediation and presentation (see Erll, 2011). In this dissertation, an additional distinction is added: the cultural memory of interest here is narrative-striving, meaning it is a narrative or at least partially narrativized. Observed like this, cultural memory can be tentatively understood as mediated narrative(s) of past events circulated in, and negotiated by, members of a memory community, with a focus on establishing collective identity. I will get back to this – including an expanded definition – in Chapter II.

Within the context of cultural memory, the question of the kinds of narratives of war films produce thus becomes a question of how films present the war for the society to remember. Feature fiction films are narrative in the sense that they (usually, albeit not always) tell stories, and those stories are told in a particular way, set up into a plot with characters, a process known as emplotment. Yet as hinted above, it is not the narrativity of the films themselves that is the primary one discussed here. Drawing on the work of James Wertsch, I consider shared memory to be predominantly narrative. Narrative as form pre-dates particular memory, offering possible structures for their telling. Narratives can thus be seen as *cultural tools* (Wertsch, 2002) indispensable to collective memory in all formats, as it relies on the narrative form to be told, learned and remembered. The relationship of filmic narratives to a specific memory-structuring narrative is in the focus of this thesis.

Narrative is a way of organizing characters, events and circumstances into a story, giving it a plot and a time structure. Narrative thus necessarily means schematization. It also means reduction: if a random life event is to be given a narrative structure, with a beginning, an end, and a clear progression in-between, some things will be included, but others will be left out for the sake of coherence and clarity. Without reduction, a structure would be impossible to uphold. In his analysis, Wertsch focuses on how history narratives are written and re-written, and how memory is negotiated in the process of coming together between individuals and these narratives. He also discusses the relations between different narrative texts. For this dissertation,

the latter – Wertsch’s understanding of textual narratives and their relations – is central. Wertsch differentiates between two levels of narrative: specific narratives, which have “specific settings, characters and events” and schematic narrative templates (Wertsch, 2002, pp. 60–62, 2004). The latter are more abstract forms, which revolve around functions, namely particular ways of organizing individual narratives, means of narrative organization that can be extrapolated and generalized beyond individual stories, and that remain unchanged even if specific characters or settings change.

The argument this dissertation makes, building on Wertsch’s work, is that in Croatia, collective memory of the war overall was strongly influenced by a particular kind of schematic narrative template. My understanding (and use) of the concept of narrative template (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II) differs somewhat from Wertsch’s own. Wertsch’s deeper observation of narratives perceives the narrative template as a form that shapes different narratives across contexts – meaning it structures different stories in a similar way. In contrast, I look at a very specific template that grew out of a specific context, without necessarily asking whether this template is specific to Croatia only, or it can be traced back to even more abstract narrative templates shaping memory of wars, national independence etc. beyond the Croatian context. This template thus shapes a particular story in its various incarnations and characters (as will be explained in more detail in Chapter II), dictating the core elements of the ‘Homeland war’ narrative. It is this core that I refer to when I speak of the *dominant narrative*: a narrative that is at the same time the core of the stories told about the war, and works as a schematic narrative template for other, future narratives.

The war narrative in question was developed during the war, out of the efforts of the political elites to control the story of the ‘Homeland War.’ This story was successfully set, and – in the immediate post-war period – turned into official (political) memory. This memory was then spread (including through official legal means) onto framing discourse wider than solely

that of official politics, working as a schematic template shaping future narratives, including those that were not a part of political, but cultural memory. It thus significantly reduced the discursive space for discussing the events of the period. And while coercive means and acts of public pressure also played a role in limiting this discussion to a particular version of the war story (in particular in the 90's, when the dominant narrative was both enforced through media control and protected through silencing dissent, sometimes violently), I argue that Wertsch's work on narratives as textual limitations to memory helps us understand that coercion is in fact not always necessary. Narrative templates also work to limit the ways certain topics are spoken of, making even contrarian responses bound by the starting narrative(s). This is not to say that narrative templates are deterministic, or as Wertsch puts it, that new histories (and memories) are "determined solely by the functions of narratives" (Wertsch, 2002, p. 91). However, these functions matter, opening a perspective for studying the relationship between the dominant narrative (political memory) and cinema in a novel way. To put it differently, a lot of the specific narratives about the 'Homeland War' were organized around the same narrative template, conveniently provided top-down, which has become the norm when remembering the war not only in politics, but also in culture. The idea of narratives/templates is further elaborated in Chapter II, while in Chapter III I provide an overview of literature to show that in Croatia there was – and is – indeed such a dominant narrative in place.

It is against this dominant narrative that films are analyzed here. The dissertation moves Wertsch's ideas from focusing on political textual narratives – and the way history texts respond to other history texts after changes of regime – to the sphere of culture, namely film as narrative text. At the center of analysis is the *dialogic quality* of the text. Originally an idea Wertsch adopted from Mikhail Bakhtin, it stands for the deeply social quality of language and thus every text, which exists in a permanent dialogue with earlier utterances. Texts are always, in various ways, in dialogue with other texts. The challenge is thus to spot out that dialogue. In this

dissertation, I analyze films with that idea in mind. The claim is that over the course of the 14 years discussed here are, films – due to the specific memory context discussed above – dialogically connected with other texts. Yet as all individual acts of dialogue would be impossible to trace, as the amount of texts involved in producing and reproducing the political memory would be outside of the scope of this dissertation to track, the narrative template – the dominant narrative in its most basic elements – is used as a heuristic shortcut to observing and understanding this dialogue. This process of dialogic negotiation is my central concern.

To answer the two research questions – do films deal with the past, and if so, how – this dissertation uses two methods. To gain an idea on how present the war is in contemporary Croatian fiction film, a thematic analysis was conducted on a large data set, comprising of all feature fiction films made in Croatia as domestic productions or majority co-productions in the period between 2001 and 2014. As the results of the thematic analysis, the films were divided into four separate groups. A more limited dataset, consisting of films that thematize the war (and were coded for it in the thematic analysis), was thus created and subjected to a process of further analysis. The aim of this second stage of analysis was to gain insight into *how* films in each of the groups deal with the war through dialogically negotiating with the dominant narrative. I looked at the relationships between the film texts and the memory narrative through analyzing the textual elements of films as well as the contextual meaning they produce with regard to the dominant narrative. This process is documented in more detail in Chapter II. The aim was to offer a new way of understanding what these films “do” to memory of the war in the Croatian context – or rather what they would do if they would be taken seriously in their memory-making potential. Explaining the latter point requires a small digression.

The films analyzed here, while engaged in a process of negotiation with the dominant narrative, have contributed relatively little to collective (cultural) memory of the war, meaning for the most part they cannot be understood as *memory-productive* films (see Erll, 2011),

namely films that actively shape the memory of a particular group. To understand their place in the memory-shaping process, Aleida Assmann's distinction between remembering and forgetting, both of which can be observed in their passive and active dimension (A. Assmann, 2008), is useful. According to Assmann, an act of active forgetting involves destroying cultural objects that evoke certain memories, while passive forgetting means "non-intentional acts such as losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning, or leaving something behind" leading the objects to "fall out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use" (2008, p. 98). Similarly, active remembering entails using and interpreting media, while passive remembering means storing them for later, keeping them at bay but not as an active part of the memory conversation. Assmann refers to the latter as an archive of memory, preserving the "past as past", and to the former as canon, preserving the "past as present" (2008, p. 98). The border between canon and archive is porous. In case of events of the more recent past, I argue, the distinction is especially not clear-cut. Processes of hiding, neglecting and rejection happen often in the public eye; canonic memories are frequently challenged by counter-memories, even if this happens on the fringes, in small-circulation media, minor art galleries rather than history museums, and cinema halls. In Croatia, cinema in particular has been caught up in the gap between displaced and canonized: films subtly questioning the dominant narrative are played on TV, screened at festivals, discussed periodically; some are very loudly rejected in public, thus gaining a memory role through negation and often based on nothing more than assumptions about the stories they tell.⁶ These films are thus not part of the canon; yet they are very much a porous archive. They are often in a paradoxical position of simultaneously being present and absent from memory

⁶ A good example appeared as I was already in the process of finishing this thesis: the film *Chris the Swiss* (2018) by Anja Kofmel, about the author's journalist uncle who was killed during the 'Homeland War' in 1992, was set to premiere in Cannes. when news broke out that the Croatian audiovisual centre (HAVC) will not be approving the film due to its content, which diverged dramatically from the original script (see Zajović, 2018). The more likely reason for this, however, was the pressure of veterans' associations, which accused the film of false propaganda, as it presented the war in Croatia as a civil war (see Narod.hr, 2018). The film was at this point not yet screened in Croatia; yet it made headlines due to what was perceived as its content.

debates. While they are publicly debated, these debates are mostly aimed at excluding them from memory processes because they counter – or are perceived to counter – the dominant memory story. At the same time, these processes of public rejection make them visible and unexpectedly relevant for the same debate they are being excluded from. This dissertation thus, expanding slightly on Assmann’s concepts, treats films as borderline archival memory materials, looking into what kinds of alternatives to dominant memory this archive holds. The dissertation makes no claim that the films discussed represent collective memory, thus ignoring the “problem of reception” (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 180), namely leaving unexplained the ways in which collective memories become collective. Rather, it accepts that most of these films have been only marginally included in what Erll (2011) labels as “plurimedial networks”: networks of media that circulate other media content, making it visible, present and thus candidate for canonization. Yet the films are limited and shaped by, and respond to, the dominant memory narrative, and better insight can be acquired into both the workings of film and collective memory if we observe them as such. The focus is thus on filmic materials as potential rather than actual memory (Assmann, in Kansteiner, 2002, p. 182; J. Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

The process of analysis described above resulted in a categorization of films as those of *dealing with*, those *bypassing* and those *assuming* the recent past. These three categories require some elaboration. In the first category – *films dealing with the past* – are films that actively engage with the dominant memory of the war. The films in this group employ four different strategies in their dialogical responsiveness: (just) critical dialogue, (failed) polyphony, responding through trauma-silence or affirming the dominant narrative. All these strategies will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV; it here suffices to say that these films engage actively in attempts to either rewrite or reject the dominant narrative of the war. They also all – excluding films that employ a strategy of silent rejection – explicitly deal with the memory of the past, actively trying to affirm versions of it. *Films bypassing the past* do something else: they try to

shift the focus from narrating the war at large to offering smaller stories that shift the perspective on the war. These films not only “zoom in” on relationships between particular characters (thus depoliticizing the narrative they offer), but also focus more on establishing a stable narrative of the present, rather than on resolving conflicts with the dominant narrative of the past. This strategy gives voice and narrative ownership to both Serb and Croat characters, breaking down the “us-them” division, yet at the same time the strategy these films employ seems like preemptive protection from a backlash – how much criticism can the dominant narrative take? Finally, the last group of films – *films assuming the past* – ask the viewer to fill in the empty space of the film with his or her own narrative, while providing cues on what kind of narrative this should be: a victorious, celebratory one, or one of critique. I argue that these films, which frequently get overlooked when considering the role of cinema in memory-making, should in fact very much be taken seriously in this regard, as they help stabilize or destabilize the dominant narrative even without offering an explicit (re)writing of the war.

1.2 The outline of the dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows. In Chapter II, I explicate in more detail the theoretical framework and methodological approach used in the research. A detailed account of the concept of collective memory (including both political and cultural) the dissertation works with is given, situating the research within this vast, and often difficult to navigate, field. Furthermore, details are given on the case selection, both methodological approaches, as well as the research process. I discuss the authors whose works this dissertation builds upon, with regard to both the memory framework and the idea of hidden dialogicality, which informs the methodological approach as well. In the process, I situate the dissertation within wider fields of research: not just memory studies, but also studies of memory and cinema, as well as previous research on film and society in the post-Yugoslav context. I also explain the idea of the narrative scheme in a bit more detail, to make it clear why it is used as a

proxy for analysis. The aim of the chapter is to provide an understanding of the theoretical framework that informs my view of the relationship between film and war discourse in Croatia, thus setting the stage for the analytical chapters to follow.

Chapter III answers the need to convince the reader of the central assumption of this dissertation, namely that the field of collective memory is truly dominated by one particular narrative of the war, and that this narrative – the political memory of the conflict – is so strong, it can be considered to serve as a schematic template for other narratives as well. To do this, I first offer some facts about the armed conflict in Croatia, then proceed to explain how this was narrativized into a story of the ‘Homeland War’ – which went on to become both political memory and a schematic template. I also explain why I think it is, despite the passing of time, valid to use a static version of this narrative – elements that are stable over time and can thus work as a schematic template in the first place – as a proxy for tracing the dialogical processes in films. In a nutshell, the idea is that this narrative has in fact changed very little over time, despite being challenged by several powerful actors, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – the role of which I discuss at some length, sketching out the process of memory negotiation related to it.

Chapters IV to VI present the results of the second stage of analysis, elaborating on the different strategies (and in some cases sub-strategies) the films take with regard to the dominant narrative, and explaining the effects this has on memory. As my starting question – what do these films “do” to the memory of the war – was to an extent descriptive, I take the time to elaborate on these strategies, and show how sometimes, very different film stories and styles led to similar results.

In Chapter IV, I discuss films that actively grapple with the dominant narrative, in attempts to challenge it or reaffirm it. Using two additional concepts – namely trauma and

polyphony – I sketch out in detail how these films offer quite different responses to the dominant narrative, breaking it down in some sense but also leaving elements of it intact.

In Chapter V, I look at films that, in short, depoliticize their talk of the war in order to build grounds for a present that no longer relies on “us-them” ethnic divides (while celebrating this rebellion as an act of carnivalesque mischief against authority more generally) – only to subdue their own message through stylistic means.

Finally, in Chapter VI, I make a case for including into studying memory a bunch of films that would otherwise get overlooked in memory studies, and which I call films assuming the past for the way they enter dialogue with the dominant narrative. These films assume the existence of the dominant narrative as a kind of “common knowledge” and invite the viewers to either embrace and imprint that knowledge into the text of the film (which becomes complete only once an interpretation of the war is incorporated within it), or to reflect critically on it. Key insights from the analysis, as well as the contributions this dissertation makes to the literature and suggestions for further research, are summarized in the concluding chapter.

2 CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND METHOD

The introductory chapter provided a guideline through the main questions, goals and structure of this dissertation. In this chapter, the theoretical and methodological framework is set up. The chapter is divided into two subsections. In the first part, I build a theoretical framework which situates the work within the wider academic literature, delineating the key concepts and reflecting critically on the existing literature. The central concept is collective memory, which I elaborate on in detail below. In the second part, the methodological framework is set up and practical information given regarding case selection and the two-step research process pursued: what exactly was analyzed, and how, in the course of the empirical work.

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 Collective and cultural memory

2.1.1.1 *A note of introduction*

The concept of collective memory is a complex one. In this section, some of its most prominent interpretations are considered. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview,⁷ but to tap into existing conceptualizations of memory that stretch beyond individual recollection and are tied to culture, political and social life, with the goal of developing a conceptualization suitable for the research project undertaken in this dissertation.

Memory has long been in the focus of human interest (see Bower, 2000 for memory as a psychological phenomenon; A. Assmann, 2011; Olick, 2011), yet the research of memory as a cultural phenomenon is of slightly newer date. Emerging as an object of interest in the 19th century (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011a, p. 14), following a long period of human

⁷Overviews abound, and although none are exactly comprehensive, they are more than insightful when it comes to both the development and the current state of memory literature. See Erll, 2011, 2012; Erll & Nünning, 2008; Misztal, 2003; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011; Radstone & Schwarz, 2010; Rossington & Whitehead, 2007; Tota & Hagen, 2016; Whitehead, 2009.

fascination with memory (see Misztal, 2003, Chapter 2; Whitehead, 2009; Yates, 1966) on the individual level, and reaching a new peak in scholarly interest with the beginning of the 20th century, collective memory has since become the center of a prolific stream of scholarly work. This has not gone without a backlash: some have critically labelled the recent surge in memory literature a “memory boom” (Bajovic, 2012; Klein, 2000), with others warning of a possible “surfeit” (Maier, 1993). Yet the concept of collective memory is by now widespread in social sciences and humanities.

At the same time, what collective memory specifically refers to is often a matter of confusion or dispute, summarized illustratively in James V. Wertsch’s observation that collective memory can mean “any number of things depending on the conversation in which it is embedded” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 5). The proliferation of terminology further complicates the understanding of the concept. Literature speaks of collective, but also communicative and cultural memory (J. Assmann, 2005; Erll, 2011), social memory (Warburg, in J. Assmann, 2008; Connerton, 1989), public memory (Bodnar, 1993), collective remembrance (Winter & Sivan, 1999), national memory (Winter, 2006), prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004), postmemory (Hirsch, 1997), social, political and cultural memory (A. Assmann, 2006, 2010), media memory (Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011), popular memory (Popular Memory Group, 1982) and others. Other concepts add to this proliferation. For example, Pierre Nora’s idea of sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*; see Nora, 1997) is understood in the literature as anything from physical sites of commemoration (Winter, 2008, 2010) to “symbols, handbooks, dictionaries, monuments, commemorations, and expositions” (den Boer, 2008, p. 21).⁸ Yet conceptual clarity is not simply a value in itself, but is at the core of studying collective memory: conceptual understanding partially instructs the methodological approach (see Olick, 1999).

⁸ As Erll points out (Erll, 2011, pp. 24–25), this was actively propelled by Nora himself; while his original conception of memory sites required the sites to cover three dimensions – material, functional and symbolic – his own empirical work quickly abandoned those same limitations.

Apart from terminological and conceptual difficulties, other critiques have been directed at studying collective memory. The process of transferring the concept of memory from individual to collective level did not come without skepticism (see Gedi & Elam, 1996). Some dismiss the idea of collective memory altogether as a “fiction” (Sontag, 2005) - even if most authors successfully bypass in their research the idea that “some sort of collective mind or consciousness exists above and beyond the minds of the individuals in a collective” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 21). Authors like Klein (Klein, 2000) have criticized memory as a research agenda, but also the growing field of memory studies for its various problematic moments. The usefulness of the concept – which was said to have become “conceptually and sociologically problematic” (Huysen, 2015, p. 37) – has been questioned, not least because “[i]n any collectivity, there will inevitably be conflict and struggle over memory that rarely, even within small groups, amount to something one could call collective” (2015, p. 38). Others have tried to bring to attention the methodological issues plaguing works relying on the concept of memory (see Confino, 1997; Kansteiner, 2002). Finally, the differentiation of memory from history, a debate dating back at least to Halbwachs (see Olick, 2008a), has brought in plenty of complexities of its own (see e.g. Poole, 2008; Sturken, 1997, Chapter 1). In parallel to the growing criticisms, however, the work on memory blossomed – between a pull to isolate into a separate discipline of memory studies and a rejection of the need for a single, overarching approach at the expense of openness to multidisciplinary (Radstone, 2008).

2.1.1.2 The concept(s) of collective memory

What then are we speaking of when we speak of collective memory? The term can be traced back to Emile Durkheim and his student Maurice Halbwachs (Olick, 2008a), the French sociologist⁹ whose writing on the topic still constitutes the most frequently cited attempt at

⁹ For Halbwachs’ ties to wider sociological context of his time, see Misztal, 2003; for Halbwachs’ work on memory, see Erll, 2008, 2011; Olick, 1999; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011; Whitehead, 2009

theorizing the connection between memory and society. For Halbwachs, all memory is social in the sense that memories are necessarily determined by social frameworks of groups individuals belong to as members. This is so even if it is in fact individuals who remember, not abstract societal groups. Moreover, all individuals belong to multiple groups, meaning collective memory is always more than one (Halbwachs, 1980; Misztal, 2003, pp. 50–56). The collectivity of memory is never equal to a combination of individual memories. Instead, what and how we remember is triggered by the social groups we are part of, with whom we share those memories.¹⁰ “The succession of our remembrances, of even our most personal ones, is always explained by changes occurring in our relationships to various collective milieus--in short, by the transformations these milieus undergo separately and as a whole” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 49). Sense of stability and identity¹¹ of a group over time is thus maintained through memory. Time is an important factor in another sense: memory of a group can only exist as long as the group exists, which gives the collective memory Halbwachs devises a limited duration. With the disappearance of group members who remember, their memory disappears.

Or at least so it would appear. Halbwachs’ idea of collective memory, generational (see below) and primarily focusing on groups with immediate personal contact, did not appear to encompass memories of “imagined” collectivities such as nations.¹² Remembrance of events belonging to the distant past was thus not seen as memory, but something else: for Halbwachs, it is rather history itself, generalized, condensed, like “a crowded cemetery, where room must constantly be made for new tombstones” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 52). Yet the concept of

¹⁰ Individual memories of the same event are also not homogenous but tend to differ; this however does not change the fact that what is remembered and how it is remembered is more or less constant for all group members, and that they all remember those particular events precisely because they are members of the group.

¹¹ „Collective memory, being both a shared image of the past and the reflection of the social identity of the group that framed it, views events from a single committed perspective and thus ensures solidarity and continuity” (Misztal, 2003, p. 52). Misztal also argues that for Halbwachs, identity precedes collective memory (2003, p. 55).

¹² “During my life, my national society has been theater for a number of events that I say I ‘remember,’ events that I know about only from newspapers or the testimony of those directly involved. These events occupy a place in the memory of the nation, but I myself did not witness them. I carry a baggage load of historical remembrances that I can increase through conversation and reading. But it remains a borrowed memory, not my own” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 51).

collective memory evolved in Halbwachs' later work to include "collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces", namely the processes of invention of shared versions of the past that go beyond immediate social contact (Olick, 1999, p. 336; see also Olick et al., 2011; Assmann, 2010).¹³ As Erll (2011, pp. 16–17) points out, while for Halbwachs the primary social framework are always other individuals and the cultural schemata they bring, the material (external) framework of culture does play a role in his work.

If the latter was not, however, in the focus for Halbwachs, it was at the heart of the memory work of Pierre Nora. Nora (Nora, 1997)¹⁴, dedicating his project to understanding specifically French memory,¹⁵ insisted on the presence of shared *sites of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*) evoking collective remembrance, replacing an environment in which individuals remember. Memory, as the tie between present and past, has given way – Nora posits – to history, which is nothing more than a "representation of the past" (Nora, 1997, p. 3). History, which "belongs to everyone and to no one" (1997, p. 3), is incapable of forging identity.¹⁶ Nora's conceptualization of memory as it no longer exists is "thick": omnipresent, vivid, living, "all-powerful, sweeping, un-self-conscious and inherently present-minded" (1997, p. 2), "sacred" (Nora, 1997, p. 7). Memory embodied in the memory sites, which have – with the loss of memory proper – become all that is left of remembering, is "thin" in comparison: emptied

¹³ Olick (Olick, 1999) finds the tension present in Halbwachs' work between collective memory as individual and above-individual to be symptomatic of the field of memory research as a whole; the distinction between a collection of individual memories collected into one, as only individuals can actually have memories (which Olick labels collected memory) or a more sociological approach (collective memory), which takes into consideration how societal frameworks - including memory technologies - shape memories. The two conceptualizations of collective memory take different methodological approaches: while one employs a more individual-focused research methodology (often positivist, but also psychology-based, for example), the other tends to employ a more interpretivist one, attempting to tap into the structures that are outside of the individual (beginning with Halbwachs' social frameworks of memory).

¹⁴ On Nora, see Erll, 2011; Wood, 1994.

¹⁵ This was partially in response to the reflexive narrative turn in history, which meant historians actively started reflecting on what made national identity, rather than taking that identity as a natural given – a project within which Nora's reflexive investigation of French memory fitted right in; see Hutton, 2016.

¹⁶ Nora sees the downfall of history in its move from the focus on the nation, which is „no longer the unifying framework that defines the collective consciousness" (Nora, 1997, p. 6).

out of its meaning for members of the community, reduced instead to storing, archiving. For Nora, the community of interest is primarily the nation, and specifically the French nation.

The precise mechanisms at work in Nora's conceptualization are far from clear, not the least because Nora often broke his own conceptual boundaries (Erll, 2011, pp. 22–27). Yet his focus on French memory set the path for collective memory as primarily a nation-bound concept. This implicit connection has become widely questioned in the last decade: not just through the study of Holocaust memory – which has not belonged to the Jewish community only, but also to other victims, perpetrators, and the Commonwealth as a whole – but also through rising interest in European, diasporic and cross-border memory (De Cesari & Rigney, 2014). Nora's project shifted attention from individuals and groups to artefacts – spaces, texts, statues, objects as remnants of memory no longer existent – in a way Halbwachs had not been willing to do. It also made memory a temporally different concept than that of Halbwachs: in its genuine form, collective memory is seen as a connection that binds distant past to the future, expanding far beyond the relatively short focus Halbwachs had granted it.

The two theories of memory cited above set the stage for most collective memory work to come. In this dissertation I draw, in conceptualizing memory, primarily on three later works: the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann on cultural memory; the dynamism and media-focus brought in by Astrid Erll, and the work of James Wertsch with regard to both narrativity of memory and the theoretical assumptions behind my methodological approach.

2.1.1.3 Jan and Aleida Assmann's conceptualization of collective memory

Jan Assmann lists six characteristics of collective memory: the concretization of identity, preserving the unity of the group; its capacity to reconstruct, always changing and relating past to the present; formation, objectification of communicated meaning and shared knowledge; organization; obligation, building a hierarchy of relevance of symbols in shaping a self-image; and reflexivity (J. Assmann, 1995, 2011). The preservation of identity is particularly relevant

here – and this identity is gained in large part through learning. The idea of collective memory – a group’s version of the past – is primarily that of knowledge, and thus of something beyond one’s own experience. It is also socially curated. “To participate in the group’s vision of its past (...) means that one has to learn about it. One cannot remember it, one has to memorize it... it is knowledge that backs up (not an ‘I’ but) a ‘we’” (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 38).

The Assmanns’ theory of collective memory introduces the concept of *cultural memory*.¹⁷ They differentiate between two forms of collective memory: communicative and cultural. The former is “everyday memory.” It is intergenerational, mostly oral, based on personal witnessing and arising from direct interactions within a community (J. Assmann, 1995, 2008, 2011). Everyday communication can only transfer information as old as its oldest member and is thus dependent on its oldest carrier for the content, spanning across at most three generations. Communicative memory is thus equivalent of Halbwachs’ notion of collective memory. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is no longer tied to individual remembrance or individual carriers but is media-enabled and of longer duration. Cultural memory refers to the “body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” and upon which “each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity” (J. Assmann, 1995, p. 132). It is “exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms” (J. Assmann, 2008, p. 110), meaning the focus is once again turned towards cultural artefacts. It is also gated in the sense communicative memory is not, requiring institutionalization and structuring of access.

The concept of cultural memory was further expanded in Aleida Assmann’s distinction (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 40) between individual, social, political and cultural memory as memory formats individuals partake in, based on three criteria: extension in space and time, size of group, and volatility or stability. Individual memory (2010, p. 40), which belongs primarily to

¹⁷ cf. Assmann's use of the term cultural memory to Erll's and Rigney's broader understanding in Erll, 2011; Rigney, 2016.

neurologists and social psychologists as a research interest, is already interactively constructed. It is short-term, unstable and does not travel well: even when stabilized in narrative, it is lost with the death of the individual (A. Assmann, 2006), unless integrated into other memory formats. Social memory, which seems a rough equivalent to Halbwachs' collective memory, "refers to the past as experienced and communicated (or repressed) within a given society" (2010, p. 41). Social memory is shared in societal groups (such as generations), and is thus of medium-term duration, changing in generational intervals.

Individual and social memory are persons-bound. Political and cultural memory are different in this regard, as they last beyond individuals and generations. Temporally longer-spanning, designed to surpass generational remembrance, they are necessarily mediated and "founded on durable carriers of symbols and material representations" (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 42). Political memory is the top-down produced memory, more stable than its two discussed counterparts, self-contained and homogenous as a narrative with a clear message. It integrates little of other memory formats – unless there are reasons to do so. And its stabilization in objects and rites makes it long-durational. Perhaps most important in the context of this dissertation is its narrative dimension: it is "emplotted in a narrative that is emotionally charged and conveys a clear and invigorating message" (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 43), and anchored in sights and performances – an element that comes off as Assmann's integration of sites of memory into her own work. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is not as fixed in narrative terms: rather, it maintains a permanent openness to negotiation. Finally, the boundaries between the two formats are not stable and fixed but can be permeated.

Cultural memory significantly broadens the scope of memory studies. It introduces the idea of cultural artefacts as "carriers" of memory, thus inviting research on a wide variety of those artefacts in different societies. It also, by differentiating between the canon¹⁸ (elements

¹⁸ "The active memory of the canon perpetuates what a society has consciously selected and maintains as salient and vital for a common orientation and a shared remembering; its institutions are the literary and visual canon, the

selected and maintained as relevant to the memory of a collective) and archive (the at present unused artefacts),¹⁹ enables scholars to look into far more memory materials than Jan Assmann's initial writing on cultural memory seemed to imply (see Erll, 2011). The process of collective memory-making always also includes forgetting, whether active (deliberate destruction) or passive (unintentional, unplanned); and it includes selecting, canonizing, preserving "past as present" and storing "past as past" into the archive for potential future use (A. Assmann, 2008). The canon is the active, identity-building dimension of collective identity which "is built on a small number of normative and formative texts, places, persons, artefacts and myths" in steady circulation, marked by "selection, value and stability" (2008, p. 100), meaning these artefacts have been thoroughly pre-selected, are considered of supreme value and are stable in their role over time. The archive, on the other hand, is a storage of that which is already pre-selected, stored for future potential use and also limited in access (A. Assmann, 2011, pt. three). The notion of storage is here taken to imply both a literal (storage space, physical archive) and a metaphorical (archive as an unused potential) meaning.

There appears to be a slight difference between the two authors' understanding of how cultural memory is constituted and shared. While Jan Assmann's work on cultural memory does not treat its artefacts as untouchable, the emphasis on "ongoing changes, innovations, transformations, and reconfigurations" (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 44) is more pronounced in Aleida Assmann's work. And while the former places great emphasis on the entry points to memory – the work of interpreters who open the cultural artefacts to memory – the latter's insistence on

school curricula, the museum, and the stage, along with holidays, shared customs, and remembrance days" (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 43).

¹⁹ "Cultures that rely on writing systems for long-term storage of information develop a distinction between what I call a 'canon' and an 'archive'. This division draws a line between what is (or ought to be) remembered by the group (in terms of repeated performances, readings, citations, and references) and what in the long run has been neglected, forgotten, excluded, or discarded but is still deemed worthy and important enough to be preserved in material form. The active memory of the canon perpetuates what a society has consciously selected and maintains as salient and vital for a common orientation and a shared remembering; its institutions are the literary and visual canon, the school curricula, the museum, and the stage, along with holidays, shared customs, and remembrance days" (A. Assmann, 2010, p. 43).

cultural memory's requirement for "individual forms of participation such as reading, writing, learning, scrutinizing, criticizing, and appreciating" appears to emphasize the necessity for individual involvement in the knowledge-gaining process constituting a group's identity.

One final element of cultural memory theory requires reflection. The concept of cultural memory that the Assmanns propose appears to take on a particularly time-restrained meaning: cultural memory is different from communicative memory specifically for its distance from the remote past it commemorates. The remoteness is what enables it to be ritualized, symbolized, turned into dance, poetry, song, performance (see Assmann's discussion of Jan Vansina's work in the context of cultural memory in J. Assmann, 2008). Yet as Erll notes, the difference between cultural and communicative memory lies not in the concept of measurable time; "It is rather the way of remembering chosen by a community." The distinction between the two modes "rests not primarily on the structure of time (a universal, measurable category), but rather on the consciousness of time (a culturally and historically variable phenomenon of the mental dimension of culture)" (Erll, 2011, pp. 32–33). When seen like this, the Assmanns' framework becomes applicable to recent historical events, such as the 'Homeland War'. In fact, the 'Homeland War' is a prime example of the manipulation of time in terms of consciousness, turning past from what Jan Assmann observes as a change from history to "myth" (J. Assmann, 2011): the war was, even as it was still ongoing, given a special place as part of the ongoing Croatian history, turning into a special time-event in the history of national community. Much of the literature on the politics of the past in the 1990s thus uses the term myth; mythologization was a part of a strategy of the country's leadership (see for example Dolenc, 2016; Jović, 2017; Massey, Hodson, & Sekulic, 2000; Pavlaković & Perak, n.d.; Peskin & Boduszynski, 2003; Senjković, 2002b; Subotić, 2013). The war could thus take a special place in the community without being a matter of distant past.²⁰

²⁰ Most literature on Croatia speaks not of narratives, but of (founding) myths. The assumption here is that political communities are impossible without common stories, that even the most civic (not deriving on ethnic belonging

Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory offers a valuable way of thinking about how societies (among them, but not solely, nation-states) make sense of collective past and own group identity. Her differentiation between cultural and political memory opens up space for thinking about how different events and periods become selected into the collective stock of identity-stories, and about the role mediation (language, material objects, various means of storage and transmission) plays in the process. At the same time, it does not ignore the role power and politics play, in particular through shaping the top-down historical narratives, rearranging public spaces and institutionalizing the processes of selection, storage and transmission (schools, cultural events, commemorations). Yet the focus on durability of the artefacts underplays slightly another idea that is part of the same theory: namely that texts, art and other involved objects of memory are not simply there, but require interpretation, the turning of items into meaning, and that the given meaning occasionally determines the

as their basis) constitutions rely on some kind of storytelling – e.g. contract theory – to explain the origin of the political community (Cipek, 2013), and that this unity regarding basic values and ideas is the necessary underlying precondition underneath the conflict and disagreement among members of political communities. The 'Homeland War' is then presented as the key national myth.

This thesis, however, opts for the term dominant narrative for three reasons. One, because while the terminology is the same across various works speaking of myths, the theoretical assumptions and thus conceptualizations of the myth in fact do vary (for a brief summary, see Cipek, 2013). This is often not reflected on by the authors, leaving myth as an undefined term, a signifier of frequently incommensurable ideas because their focus is on fundamentally different things. In particular, what a myth needs to contain to be seen as one seems to shift; from simply assuming the existence of myth without giving it any formal properties (Jović, 2014, 2017), tracing the representation of the myth in concrete form (Sabo, 2017) as if the myth is what a myth is embodied in, to insistence on very specific structural narrative elements within the myth (Petrović, n.d., 2017). Two, the focus on narrativity of the national story is here more relevant than its possible mythical dimension; in other words, a story need not necessarily be mythical in order to be a part of memory, yet it needs to be a story to begin with. But finally – and most importantly – I do not use the concept of myth because to do so would grant the particular narrative present in Croatia the power it in fact doesn't yet hold (in a similar manner that writing the 'Homeland War' without citation marks would take away the reflexivity out of the concept). If political myths are indeed the fundamentals of unity underlying the diversity of the community, then the 'myth' of the war is not yet there. It dominates political memory, yet even in arenas of political decision-making there are differing views of how seriously it should be taken (see Chapter III); it spills over into cultural memory, yet from the beginning of its formation it has also been heavily contested, meaning it is not close to achieving the status of the underlying value the community can agree on. While the question of whether this narrative satisfies the Barthesian understanding of myth as a dominant ideology so present it appears almost natural (Barthes, 1995; Chandler, 2006) is indeed one open to debate, I would argue that the level of contestation is still such that one should not take the mythical value of the narrative for granted, even if it is omnipresent and seen by many as 'the way things are'. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the frequent contestations that come against any visible attempts to challenge this narrative: if the narrative were indeed so deeply engrained that it had reached the mythical status, there would be less fear of contestation, and more leniency towards diverging voices.

canonization of the artefacts, rather than vice versa. Artefacts are not simply sources of memory's stability, but both stable materials and materials within fluctuating spaces of interpretation (Rigney, 2008). Moreover, emphasis on purposefulness of memory and its duration can take attention away from the inner dynamic of collective memory, the competing narratives that exist and vie for prominence across formats, e.g. with personal narratives being mediated and integrated into cultural memory. The latter intersection of memory formats is especially relevant in the work of authors who deal with recent memory of war and conflict (see, for example Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000), where the battle for collective identity is still actively being fought – or in research done by left-wing intellectuals who see the bottom-up memory as by definition oppositional, counter- and protest-memory (Foucault, 1974; Popular Memory Group, 1982).

2.1.1.4 A model for memory: The work of Astrid Erll

Erll's cultural semiotics model, which sees cultural memory as an interplay of three dimensions – material, social and mental (Erll, 2011, Chapter IV) – is an attempt to address the issue of dynamics and interconnectedness of memory. The definition of cultural memory the author operates with is broader, including all memory mediated through culture (be it individual, communicative or cultural in the Assmanns' sense).²¹ The emphasis on 'material dimension' (artefacts, media and technologies of memory), 'social dimension' (mnemonic practices such as commemorations and carriers of memory) and 'mental dimension' (schemata and codes) of memory (2011, p. 103) as parts of the memory culture reveals the connection between the three, and the relevance of each in the memory-making process. Erll also distinguishes between media, symbolic systems and modes of cultural memory (Erll, 2011, Chapter IV), which enable different ways of remembering the past. Among the systems of memory, it is the "collective-

²¹ Cultural memory is defined as "the sum total of all the processes (biological, medial, social) which are involved in the interplay of past and present within sociocultural context" (Erll, 2011, 101).

semantic” and “collective-autobiographical” that are of interest here: the first referring roughly, borrowing its terminology from individual memory, to stored memory of the archive; the second to the active, identity-forming memory of a particular group (Erll, 2011, pp. 105–108).

Erll’s model is valuable for how it articulates the mediated, media-embedded nature of cultural memory. Various versions of the same event exist in people’s minds, whether in result of personal experience or family storytelling, community commemorative practices or group-shared experiences. Just as personal recollections cannot become a part of family heritage (the communicative-collective memory) without being mediated (telling, writing, filming etc.), more abstract communities such as nations cannot share memories without narratives publicly articulated through media. At the same time, media are more than articulators, neutral containers: they are shapers of memory, through both form and content. The author differentiates between the material and social dimension of mediums of memory. Material dimension refers to communication instruments (e.g. language, writing, image) which enable externalization of memory from individuals to others; media technologies help stabilize and disseminate texts (e.g. printing press, or today the Internet) and store them for eventual later use, giving memory its time- and space-durability surpassing individuals. On the collective level, media of memory store contents of memory, make them available in circulation across space and time, and serve as triggers to collective remembrance (in Nora’s sense). On the individual level they set up frameworks for how we remember, a fact that was clear already to Halbwachs and integrated into his theory of collective memory (Erll, 2011). Yet all media are considered no more than offerings: materiality is only a precondition, a memory potential. The process of translation from a “medial phenomenon” to a “medium of memory” happens on the social dimension (Erll, 2011, p. 124). The social use of media is what makes the shift to something becoming a part of collective memory. “[M]edia must be *used* as media of memory, the memory-making role must be *attributed* to them by specific people, at a specific time and

place” (2011, p. 124). Whether it becomes one depends on the often unpredictable social-contextual factors, including the (already existing) specific context of remembrance.

Emphasizing the mediality of memory is by now commonplace (e.g. A. Assmann & Shortt, 2012; Brunow, 2015; Hoskins, 2001; van Dijck, 2007). Less so is the prediction how memory media will impact memory in a concrete case, as it is a matter of specific context. Erll explores how media gets processed in public and integrated into memory through processes of premediation and remediation (Erll, 2008b, 2011; Erll & Rigney, 2009) – terms taken over from Bolter and Grusin (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) in an attempt to explain the anchoring of media of memory and their rootedness in previous memory media. Remediation as a kind of media intertextuality (which makes media representations seem more authentic and “true” to the depicted event by, paradoxically, drawing on previous, familiar forms of representation) and premediation as societal schema that steer the future representation of new events, make memory present also inside the media themselves, as well as giving it intelligibility, authenticity and stability for certain memory representations (Erll, 2011, pp. 139–143). An important point here is Erll’s claim regarding media’s attempts at establishing a sense of authenticity of representation, the sense of “how it really happened” – while that same authenticity is already denied by the existence of the medium itself, which shapes memory rather than merely reflecting the past.

2.1.1.5 Cultural memory in this dissertation

Having summarized the most relevant influences, I conceptualize collective memory for the purpose of this work. For one, it is here understood as cultural memory, with “cultural” taking on a narrow meaning close to that of Aleida Assmann’s work: not just as different from communicative (social) memory, but also as different from political memory; it can be imagined as a kind of horizontal memory layer between the two. It can thus be defined as a set of stories that stabilize a group’s identity, based on a set of cultural artefacts and constructed as

the result of a process of a continuous interpretive battle in which various possible stories (represented through cultural artefacts) are vying for their place: a process that sees them being picked-up, interpreted, discussed and integrated into wider narratives and discourses of memory, all against a broader social context. This definition is similar to that of Sturken – who defined cultural memory as “a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history” (Sturken, 1997, p. 1) – in its emphasis on the dynamic, tension-filled process of memory-making. However, it directs additional attention to the artefacts that help create those stories – and includes the realization that history and memory need not necessarily overlap;²² something can become memory without being history, or even without having happened at all.

Several things need to be unpacked in this definition. For one, emphasis is equally on the process and on the outcome. Just like the idea of individual remembrance as a process of retrieval has long been abandoned in favor of a more dynamic understanding of memory as a process of construction, the same needs to be done with collective remembrance. This does not take away value from studying materials that shape memory; for one, because the content of the process itself is not tangible except through its output, and two, because – as emphasized in

²² There is an ongoing debate in memory literature on the relationship between history and memory. From strict separation, entanglement and close similarity, various versions of the relationship between the two have been considered (for a summary of the debate, see Erll, 2011, Chapter III). From Halbwachs and Nora drawing a strict line between memory and history (with memory normatively winning in both cases) to Jay Winter stating that memory is, in essence, “history seen through affect” (Winter, 2010, p. 12), Jan Assmann subsuming one under the other through the concept of “mnemohistory”, Aleida Assmann concluding that “[h]istory turns into memory when it is transformed into forms of shared knowledge and collective identification and participation” (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 216) or Paul Grainge concluding that “despite the clear entanglements of history and memory, there remain important differences between them that prevent any simple conflation of terms. These differences have been mapped politically” (Grainge, 2003, p. 2), there is a consensus on the existence of difference between the two, but not one on where the line should be. This thesis makes no claim to being able to settle this dispute. Rather, it sets it aside, optimistically assuming with Marita Sturken that “memories and histories are often entangled, conflictual and co-constitutive” (Sturken, 1997, p. 43). It expands this optimism into assuming that it is not necessary to disentangle the two in order to be able to practically work with one, especially since knowing, as we do, that history—like memory—is not the past itself, but its narrated version (see White, 1987, 1988, 1992). As was previously mentioned, such a fluid understanding of the link between memory and history is not dominant in the literature. From Halbwachs to Nora and to Foucault’s preference of memory as counter-history, the more common attitude is that the two are in fact two radically different phenomena; for an excellent summary see Burton, 2007.

the work of Aleida Assmann – cultural memory does not rely on all available objects all the time, but on some objects at particular points in time, and it is these objects (as well as those that constitute the background archive) that are of interest to memory scholars. To look at memory is thus always to look at it at a particular point in time: to look at the result of a metaphorical remembering process, a performance through various artefacts.

Second, and related, memory is a discursive construct (Erll, 2011). Far from being “natural” or given, it is rather created, spoken, enacted, told. This construct is marked by its “presentness” (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010a; cf. Olick, 2007): the past is always remembered from the perspective of the present (J. Assmann, 1995, p. 130), often privileging the interest of the contemporary (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 180; cf. Olick, 2007, pp. 55–57). It is there to legitimate the present social order (Connerton, 1989, p. 3). This is particularly the case when discussing national memory, for the unity of the nation is often seen as needing something to base itself on (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) in what is likely the most accurate metaphorical transfer of the notion of memory from individual to collective identity.²³ The idea of “battle” and “vying” represents here at the same time both the contested nature of cultural memory and its multifacetedness. It conveys the idea that there are different possible memories existing at all times; only some of them will become canonized²⁴– but also that the artefacts

²³ If Olick is right that “[t]he problem of collective memory...arises in a particular time and a particular place...namely where collective identity is no longer as obvious as it once was” (Olick et al., 2011a, p. 8), then it is no surprise that it arose – and is ongoing - in a country that has not only lost one (Yugoslav) political identity, but has had to grapple with the problematic consequences of building another, in particular in the form of war crimes. Yet out of this assumption it does not follow that the relevance of memory somehow occurs naturally; in a national context, it is rather the opposite: memory is mobilized because it is functional, not natural.

²⁴ As Rigney points out (Rigney, 2016), Assmanns’ assumption is essentially that cultural memory is a kind of canonical memory, limited to very few texts and – one may add – entry points, meaning interpreters. Rigney’s notion of cultural memory is wider, as it scrapes the hard distinction between communicative and cultural in Assmanns’ work, emphasizing their mutual interconnectedness and thus the broader conception of cultural memory most scholars of cultural studies subscribe to. This thesis takes the critique into a different direction. What is problematic is the idea of canonic cultural artefacts that, by placing the focus on a “body of texts, images and rituals specific to each society”, with the role to “stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” (Jan Assmann, in Rigney, 2016, p. 66), ignores the dynamism of the pool of those texts, as well as their nature. Particularly in contexts where cultural and communicative memory do share a common timeframe, there is a permanent influx of attempts to destabilize the seeming stability of the artefacts; moreover, what those artefacts are – and who has the right to interpret them – remains to an extent a question of tension. Specifically, in Croatia, figures of political memory move to the sphere of culture (through publishing memoirs, making documentaries) and vice versa:

themselves can be reinterpreted in the future and fit within a different memory story. Erll's observation that canonization depends a lot on the context and previous memory is here noteworthy, as is the observation that there exists a tension between memory's presentness and its path dependency (B. Schwartz, 2016, p. 15): namely the idea that memory is not unlimited in what it can be, but is in practice in fact always bound partially by its previous representations, in both content and form.²⁵ Even when radical memory ruptures do happen (as was the case with the fall of Communism, when countries achieving independence had to re-invent their own past), this does not mean the breakdown of all narrative schemata and ways of using media of memory (see Wertsch, 2002). Previous stories shape future stories to an extent.

Another feature of cultural memory here is its porousness: the openness of cultural memory to permeability and influence by both political and social memory. I agree with Aleida Assmann that political memory is less interested in other memory formats; it requires (and acquires) them only if they are useful. Yet cultural memory does not depend on a particular source or logic; it can thus embrace parts of political memory narratives or open itself up to bottom-up input. This process is not necessarily conscious; in fact, as I show on the Croatian example, it is sometimes only partially reflected on, if at all.

Aleida Assmann's distinction between canon and archive allows for a wide understanding of memory not only as "what it is" at the moment, but as "what it could be" in the future (or "what it might be" in the present, reminding us of multiple ways of representing same events), opening another route to thinking of memory both as a diachronic phenomenon and one that depends heavily on both power and negotiation.

Finally, in the conceptualization employed here, emphasis is placed on the narrativity of cultural memory. Narratives are understood as stories told about the past; such stories

speeches and symbols from the wartime are incorporated into theatre plays, belonging to multiple memory formats simultaneously.

²⁵ This idea is again not independent from Erll's introduction of the premediation and remediation processes into memory studies.

include “specific settings, characters, and sequences of events” (Wertsch, 2004, p. 51). A narrative is thus an organized, structured story turned into a plot which organizes the diegetic story-time between a beginning and an end, simultaneously organizing the time-specific identity of a group, from the past over the present to the future. The assumption here is that, while not all memories come in narratives, they are all inclined towards narrativization in a wider sense.²⁶ The high point of this is political memory, which “is not fragmented and diverse but emplotted in a narrative that is emotionally charged and conveys a clear and invigorating message” (A. Assmann, 2004, p. 26) – a feature enabled by its controlling top-down structure, which allows for a greater (but again not total) level of homogeneity between individual renderings of a particular narrative, organized through active politics of memory in a narrow sense, one that associates the political with the institutionalized (Müller, 2004), the process of creating official memory (Jović, 2004). With regard to cultural memory, where the interpretive authority is less homogeneous and more scattered,²⁷ memory is better seen as a set of small stories and artefacts nesting within a larger, patchworked narrative framework. But top-down narratives shape memory responses in more ways than just by imposition of an official relationship to the past – as I discuss below when I introduce one last name, namely James Wertsch, among the relevant authors in this conceptual debate.

Before that, identity remains to be defined. It is here taken as an acquired set of narratives and other elements that define a community. “Communality...is based on the exchange of memories” (Rigney, 2005, p. 15). It includes also ideas that are not themselves

²⁶ A close point is made by Erll when discussing the connection between memory and literature: „In sum, large parts of cultural memory seem to be configured in much the same structure, namely narrative, that we encounter in large parts of literature. (Though it must be emphasized that neither all of literature or all of memory is inherently narrative. Visual, olfactory and unconscious memories seem essentially non-narrative, although one could argue that they become conscious and meaningful through narrativization.)” (Erll, 2011, 147).

²⁷ However, the homogeneity of narrating past as memory top-down should not be overstated either: apart from totalitarian societies, on which the state output is predominantly of singular meaning, political memory is also a dynamic field of struggle, which can integrate various representations of the past across time and across space (see, for example, Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000 on various narratives and arenas); moreover, institutions themselves are often places of contestation, and even simple output acts – such as different history handbooks – enable dissonance and tensions within the boundaries of political memory.

narrative, but that fit into the wider national narrative: cultural artefacts either do not have narratives of their own, or when they do (as is the case with narrative cinema discussed here), those narratives are not, as we shall see, fully equitable to what they “do” to the narrative of memory. Artefacts such as poems, masks or national outfits do not, in themselves, always have a memory story they come equipped with; it is the possibility of placing them into “our” story that gives them relevance with regard to cultural memory: these songs were sang by young women waiting for their lovers to come back from the war; these dresses were created by the hands of “our” women, and were worn on church Sunday, when everyone in “our” community worshipped God, etc. These bits and pieces, although themselves descriptive, fit into a wider timeline and a wider story that always starts in a distant (“mythical”) somewhere and leads to the present day. Further emphasis here is on “learned”: borrowing again from Jan Assmann’s idea that cultural memory is “exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms” (J. Assmann, 2008, p. 110), the notion of cultural memory takes away the pretense to an organic, natural binding mechanism. It also marks collective identity as something that is internalized, rather than externalized by the individual (as opposed to personal memories): people acquire their identity as group members, even in cases when that acquiring is not reflected upon, as is the case e.g. with some bodily gestures (see Connerton, 1989). Through the process of ongoing (re)interpretation of established artefacts of memory, memory is kept alive and/or altered through time – and is in this sense a working memory (Rigney, 2005).

The permeability and narrativity of cultural memory are of particular relevance here, as they allow me to observe cultural memory in Croatia as a process of dialogicality (the meaning of this term is explained in the next section) between various narratives. In studies of collective memory, there is frequently a disciplinary divide between what is studied, with political memory belonging to historians and political scientists and social memory to scholars of oral history or sociology, and cultural memory strongly in the domain of cultural studies. This is

more than a question of methodological dedication and the nature of memory being studied as “collected” or “collective” (Olick, 1999). Rather, as some have pointed out before (Ashplant et al., 2000)²⁸ and as Erll’s semiotic model enables us to comprehend theoretically, formats of memory are in permanent interaction and come to be not in separation, but in dialogue. It is one form of this dialogue that this dissertation observes, namely a dialogue between political and cultural memory. The idea is not new: works on intertextuality and adaptation have long emphasized the importance of understanding that cultural artefacts permeate each other (Genette, 1980; Mazierska, 2011a), and that this also affects memory (see Erll above). Moreover, in the relationship between film and memory, much attention has been given to the memory of the medium in the sense of its connection to the cinematic past, a cinematic intertextuality (Kilbourn, 2010). What this dissertation does differently is that it posits such dialogue between two different formats of memory (political and cultural) and between myriad embodiments of those formats, namely a large number of films and an abundance of different artefacts that have shaped or reproduced the political memory narrative, in whole or in segments.

This is also where the focus on narrative as part of cultural memory becomes important. There is an assumption of narrative’s importance on at least two levels of memory. On the one hand, for personal memories to be told is for them to be narrativized (Bal, 1999; Freeman, 2010; King, 2000; Kuhn, 2010). On the other, narrative is also a feature of political memory. Aleida Assmann notes that “[n]ation-states produce narrative versions of their past which are taught,

²⁸ Ashplant, Dawson and Roper (Ashplant et al., 2000) offer a particularly poignant base for analyzing memory in Croatia. Working specifically on war memory and commemoration, the authors point out the interconnectedness between various memory narratives, emphasizing how even individual memories are not independent of state narratives, but are rather very much framed by them; in the words of Banjevlav, who takes over the authors’ framework in her own work, “all individual, sectional and oppositional narratives are created in relation to and communication with the official one” (Banjevlav, 2013b, p. 8). Sectional memories, in the authors’ terminology, are articulated public memories that have yet to become a part of the official narrative, and can be in various relationships to it, from animosity to complementarity (Ashplant et al., 2000, p. 20), while oppositional narratives are incompatible with the official version of events.

embraced, and referred to as their collective autobiography” (A. Assmann, 2008, p. 101).²⁹ It would be too strong of a claim to say that all cultural memory is equally narrative; but as has been argued above, this dissertation assumes that a lot of it strives towards narrativity. I posit that, in the case of post-war Croatia – an environment deeply engaged with (re)defining its own identity – this tendency is reinforced by a strong domination of political memory over both social and cultural memory (see Chapter III), which required attempts for counter-memory to respond in form of artefacts, images, but also narratives or narrative segments working in direct reply to the original narrative. To elaborate on how this process is seen to work and how I turn it into practical research, I use the work of James Wertsch. While his own research does not concern cultural memory in the sense this dissertation does, it can still serve as a useful guideline for the analysis of cultural memory in a memory-saturated society such as that of Croatia. The aim is not to claim that the case of Croatia is unique, but to test if this kind of analysis adds a meaningful approach to the study of cultural memory, or it provides nothing but a celestial order of benevolent knowledge – just not with birds, but with films.

2.1.1.6 Wertsch, narrativity, and dialogicality

Wertsch’s focus is on how political memory is narrated (through history texts) and how it is negotiated by individuals exposed to those texts. He roots his work within the framework of sociocultural analysis, taking *mediated action* as a unit of analysis (Wertsch, 2002, pp. 10–11). In this understanding, remembering (as a form of mediated action) is an interplay between cultural tools and active agents employing those tools. But what are these cultural tools? Wertsch argues that human memory is textually mediated, namely “based on ‘textual resources’: narratives that stand in, or mediate, between the events and our understanding of

²⁹ Jan Assmann, who does not make a distinction between political and cultural memory formats, treats cultural memory as fully narrativized as well. “The internalized – to be more precise, remembered – past finds its form in narrative, and this has a function. Either it becomes the driving force of development or it becomes the basis of continuity. In neither case, however, is the past remembered purely for its own sake” (Assmann, 2011, p. 58).

them” (2002, p. 5). Narrative templates are tools we employ in remembering: what we remember, we remember as stories, and as particularly shaped stories at that. Narratives thus seem to play a double role for Wertsch: they enable individuals to structure experienced events into meaningful units, and they are the pre-structuring of events individuals learn, but have not experienced. “What makes collective memory collective...is that the same narrative tools are shared by members of a group” (Wertsch, 2013, p. 139). For that group, memory is also considered – as it is in the works of many writing on collective memory – a source of identity.

Wertsch takes his notion of text from his reading of Bakhtin. Text is seen as “basic organizing unit that structures meaning, communication, and thought” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 14). It has “two poles”. The first points to the property of structure or form: language. Without language, text would be unsignifying, unstructured. Wertsch illustrates this with Bakhtin’s own example of a baby cry, which is “devoid of any linguistic (signifying) repeatability” (2002, p. 15). Language is the repeatable element of a text, which every speaker uses to compile the spoken utterance.³⁰ The second pole of a text is “its use by a concrete speaker in a concrete setting” (2002, p. 15). Every utterance is much more than a combination of words: it is an unrepeatable whole spoken in a particular context. Bakhtin’s notion of text, Wertsch concludes,

³⁰ Bakhtin’s focus is on the social aspect of communication, the deep embeddedness of language into its social framework, and in fact, its separation into multiple languages which are all imbued with different meaning arising from social positioning of the speaker. The crucial term here is heteroglossia, “the situation by which an ever-changing multiplicity of social languages and speech types are artistically organized in the text” (Flanagan, 2009, p. 17). Thus language is more than a simple matter of signs, a point which differs him from linguists such as Saussure (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984; Holquist, 2002). For Bakhtin “[t]here is no ‘neutral’ utterance; language is everywhere shot through with intentions and accents; it is material, multi-accentual, and historical, and is densely overlaid with the traces of its historical usage” (Stam, 1989, p. 8). Language is always social. And social language is understood as “a concrete socio-linguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within the boundaries of a language that is unitary only in the abstract” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 356). Such understanding of language enables us to understand how it is possible for multiple people to speak of the same thing in the same words, yet for their utterances to be radically confrontational, different, reflective of each other without directly reaching for quotation marks.

“What we have in mind here is not an abstract linguistic minimum of a common language, in the sense of a system of elementary forms [linguistic symbols] guaranteeing a *minimum* level of comprehension in practical communication. We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 271).

is itself a form of mediated action, in which “[t]he repeatable aspect of a text serves as ‘a means to an end’...– that is, a resource...used by a speaker in an unique, unrepeatable way in the production of any concrete utterance” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 15). The interplay is here not simply between the speaker (the active agent composing the utterance) and the listener (the recipient, whose presence also determines the utterance; we speak differently to different people) who are in dialogue. There is a third voice in the mix, through the idea of *dialogicality*.

Dialogicality implies that three, rather than two characters participate in every utterance (speaking act): the speaker, the listener, and the preceding “societal load” of the utterance, the ways and contexts in which the spoken word was used before. “[I]f I am speaking about a topic, I am saying things in my own words and own voice; yet what I am saying is also not entirely mine, in the sense that it is not entirely my creation; it is framed by previous text” (Wertsch, 2002, pp. 16–17). The framing comes in layers, from specific words used to more general schemes of speaking, such as ideas about how one should speak when speaking of love or of one’s homeland. All these limitations are not in the language itself; it is not language that imprints heroism into a dialogue on war, for example. Rather, it is the combination of language, the social context and the language’s previous usage (the social dimension) that interact.

Moving back to collective memory, Wertsch’s claim is that we should not think of it as something existing outside of individuals. Yet it is also not something merely individual: collective memory is not simply an aggregation of what individuals remember. The process of collective remembering happens between individuals, mediated by the cultural tools they use. Members of a group (a community of memory) “share a representation of the past because they share textual resources” (Wertsch, 2002, pp. 25–26),³¹ which thus also become “identity resources” (2002, p. 96). Collective memory is thus textually mediated memory (2002, pp. 27–

³¹ Wertsch's own understanding of collective memory sees it as a phenomenon that involves „contested distribution” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 24): there are different versions of the past distributed among the population, and they compete each other rather than exist in harmony.

28): it involves knowledge of texts, but such that is not simply absorbed by the recipient, but assigns him or her an active role in the process of negotiation. Wertsch recognizes the role of externalization of memory in a similar manner as Assmann and Erll recognize its mediality. Yet he goes one step beyond in trying to offer an account of how those media and individuals interact, with an added layer of schemata intersected between the two – something Assmann does not theorize and Erll includes only as a general part of her model, focusing more on the cross-connections between different media of memory. The dominant form of texts mediating memory are narrative texts, which serve as principal “organizers of memory.” The most prominent producer of narratives are states, who offer (or in some cases impose) narrative texts on the past on their citizens, mostly through (history, but also e.g. literature) education.

Wertsch’s framework is a complex attempt to explain how historical texts become memory in a process of active negotiation mediated through narrative, as well as how history/memory texts themselves are dependent on dialogical processes. In a chapter dedicated to changes in memory from Soviet to post-Soviet Russia, he explores how narrative was at the same time a shaping and limiting factor in the shift from one version of history to another. This requires the return to the concept of dialogicality, and a new distinction between a narrative and a narrative template. As already discussed, Wertsch takes his notion of dialogicality from Bakhtin. Bakhtin’s explanation of the concept is worth citing in full here:

Imagine a dialogue of two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but in such a way that the general sense is not at all violated. The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker. We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 197)

Wertsch utilizes this idea to observe how official history – the most obvious narrative textual base for collective (political) memory – has changed from Soviet to post-Soviet period, by showing how post-Soviet historical texts entail and respond to their earlier counterparts in a

process of hidden dialogue (Wertsch, 2002, Chapter 5). His argument is twofold: while there is a push towards differentiation between texts from two different periods, their underlying narrative structure, which he refers to as *schematic narrative template* (Wertsch, 2002, pp. 93–97) remains the same. While individual characters and events change, the plot and character types remain constant long-term. Narrative template thus differs from a specific narrative: the latter refers to a specific story that is told, while the former denotes a deeper scheme that can be filled with different characters and types of situations, yet maintain the same overall structure (Wertsch, 2004, 2013).

This dissertation draws several ideas from Wertsch’s work. First, it utilizes his understanding of collective memory as predominantly (albeit not exclusively) narrative. Second, it appropriates his reading of Bakhtin’s concept of hidden dialogicality as an analytical starting point, and it also appropriates – albeit with certain changes – his concept of narrative template (see discussion below). Wertsch’s own research program with regard to connections between history texts can serve as the description of this work’s program as well, and is thus worth quoting in full. Focusing on how narratives dialogically refer to other narratives, Wertsch notes that “the key to understanding the meaning and form of one narrative is how it provides a dialogic response to previous narratives or anticipates subsequent ones. And the nature of the response can range from hostile retort to friendly elaboration, from a studied attempt to ignore other narrative to its celebration” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 60). It is precisely these responses between different potential memory texts that this dissertation attempts to capture.

Yet this dissertation borrows from Wertsch in a limited manner. It does not need to embrace his argument about memory as negotiation between texts and individuals, simply for the fact that this particular issue is not in focus: rather, it is his work on text-to-text relations that is relevant for me. Wertsch does not discuss cultural memory, as the particular format of memory that this dissertation is concerned with. Moreover, while this dissertation takes over

the idea of dialogue between texts, it adjusts it to a cross-media dialogue, rather than one between two of the same kinds of media (two sets of history texts). It moves the dialogicality from same kinds of texts (history books) to different kinds of textual utterances (films and other embodiments of the narrative template; see below). The assumption here is that cinema satisfies Bakhtin's own low threshold to be considered a text/utterance³² – a “verbal or artistic statement in its dialogically animated, living, open state” (Flanagan, 2009, p. 21) - and is thus acceptable to conceptualize it as a text for the purpose of analysis³³ (see Stam, 1989, p. 18).³⁴

This dissertation argues that Wertsch's establishing of connection between “mastering narrative texts about who did what to whom, for what reason, and in what context” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 4) and collective memory is applicable to the Croatian context. The space of memory of the war in Croatia has in fact been saturated with narrative texts – which had been produced and mastered as the war was still ongoing – of political memory to the extent that all spaces of memory have been determined by this one narrative (see Chapter III). As a result, strategies of supporting or objecting it all react to it and are themselves developed and limited through “textual resources” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 5). Thus, the best way to understand these reactions is to observe them as direct negotiations with the dominant memory narrative. Two ideas come together here. One is that the specific non-pluralistic setting in 1990s Croatia, which insisted on a single narrative (and had the power of media control to back it up), enabled this narrativization to a greater extent than would be the case in most democracies at any given time, opening up space for the existence of one dominant narrative of the ‘Homeland War’ (see Chapter III). The other idea is that context matters for memory. Memory doesn't normally grow

³² While there isn't a great amount of literature on Bakhtin and cinema, those who do apply his concepts to movies frequently point out that a lot of his work is so inherently suited to be applied to film, it is a wonder that Bakhtin himself never acted on that possibility, as an encounter was “virtually inevitable” (Stam, 1989, p. 17).

³³ Other kinds of artefacts, such as fine arts, were openly recognized as textual by Bakhtin himself, leading to an application of his categories in analysis; see for example Haynes, 2013.

³⁴ Earlier studies employing Bakhtin's work with regard to film have mostly focused on the dialogue between viewer and reader, or Bakhtin's concept of chronotope; see Flanagan, 2009; Stam, 1989, 1991.

out of nothing. Even its novel features are shaped by previous memories – a statement agreed on in some form, as I have discussed earlier, by most scholars of memory. At the same time, however, the activity of creating the utterance, of negotiating the offered memory enables a shift: memory does not have to be repeated, it can also be challenged. Challenges, too, usually do not come out of nothing; rather, they are alternative stories that can be articulated by mediating individual memories (thus sharing them into the cultural memory offering for an opportunity to be picked up as memory materials) or by larger institutional interventions (for example, the ICTY in the case of Croatia). All this is not to say that the offered political narrative was the only meaningful tool of remembrance;³⁵ but its role in Croatia was, I argue, prominent enough to warrant an in-depth research. I return to this in Chapter III, as this claim has yet to be backed up by argumentation.

2.1.1.6.1 *Dialogicality: From concept to method*

As I have elaborated above, I use Bakhtin's idea of hidden dialogicality – as read through James Wertsch – to devise an approach to analysis of films in a relatively systematic manner, following a process of first-stage thematic analysis (see below). This approach resembled studies of adaptation and intertextuality (Genette, 1980; Mazierska, 2011a, 2011b; Stam, 2000a). The idea of hidden dialogicality has been extensively used in literary studies, where it has entered through Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (see Moi, 1996). Using Bakhtin through theories of intertextuality allows the researcher to see the interconnectedness between texts (Alfaro, 1996; Allen, 2000; Todorov, 1984) foregrounding the dependence of texts on other, earlier texts. Wertsch's use of the term allowed me to shift focus from textuality and textual history to extratextual connotations of such connections. Shifting the focus from the form (the text) to the content (what the text offers), Wertsch utilizes hidden dialogicality to

³⁵ Wertsch himself refuses the deterministic role of narratives. „This is not to say that new official histories are determined solely by the functions of narratives. Obviously, other political and cultural forces play a role as well. However, processes of narrative organization and dialogic engagement provide essential semiotic resources that mediate and constrain the production of new official histories” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 91).

explore how memory is limited by previous narratives; but also how the same narrative template can be ‘filled’ with different contextual stories. Here, I briefly elaborate on how this idea was used to devise my approach for the second stage of empirical analysis.

In the second stage of analysis, this dissertation utilizes Wertsch’s appropriation of the idea of hidden dialogicality to analyze the dialogue between films and earlier narratives of the war. I posit, following the above-sketched theoretical framework, that films are best observed as being “in dialogue” with the dominant narrative of the past (see below), as this allows us to see what kinds of interventions they bring to the memory discourse – something that could not be observed by simply asking what kind of ideology films support. To consider films as dialogical utterances is to observe them as deeply imbedded into the dominant memory discourse (see Chapter III, in which I defend the existence of such a dominant discourse); this then allows us to understand what films “do” to that discourse.

As was briefly mentioned above, this kind of approach to the film material was not chosen in advance. Instead, the need for it arose after the first stage of (thematic) analysis (see below), when it became clear that there were similar ways that different groups of films were depicting the war, but what was less clear was the drive behind these differences. The literature on memory and dialogicality seemed a suitable framework for offering an answer: when I observed films as being in dialogue with the dominant narrative of the past, the different themes started to appear as best explained through taking different kinds of dialogues – what I call *strategies* of responding to the dominant narrative. By strategies, what I mean are combinations of ideas (content) and formal means of expressing those ideas (stylistic elements) that produce a particular kind of response to the dominant narrative. The analysis thus became a search for those strategies: as I show in empirical chapters IV-VI, I eventually identified three groups of strategies of dialogue, with some also including sub-strategies.

Two things remain to be said about the theoretical framework to identifying these strategies: my bringing in of additional theoretical concepts to illustrate some of them, and my conceptualization of the dominant narrative. Regarding concepts, during the process of the second stage of data analysis, I kept going back to the theoretical literature to see if there are further concepts that would help shed light on the strategies these films were showing. In the end, I settled for several additional concepts: Bakhtin's notions of polyphony (ch. IV) and the carnivalesque (ch. V) help me shed light on how filmic texts enhance and invigorate the counter-narrative rebellion by adding to it an extra layer of complexity that is written into the characters themselves and their relations. The notion of trauma, which I take over from Mieke Bal's study on personal narratives (Bal, 1999), assists me in exposing a new kind of trauma cinema (a term borrowed from Janet Walker), one in which trauma is not used by the researcher as a guiding concept to deconstruct the film, but is rather signaled by the film text to the reader in order to rebel against the simplicity and monologism of the dominant narrative. All these concepts will, for reasons of simplicity, be expanded on in their respective chapters, to elaborate how they are used to expand the analysis, as well as sometimes destabilize it and open it up to potentially contradictory meanings. What suffices to say here is that they do not serve to set up a new theoretical ground for analysis, but rather to give additional depth and clarity to that already analyzed using the theoretical framework sketched out here.

With regard to my conceptualization of the dominant narrative that cinema is in a dialogical relationship with, a clarification on how I deal with the practicality of grasping the narrative is in order. As I mentioned earlier, the few previous studies employing Bakhtin's work in cinema analysis tended to focus on the dialogue between the film and the viewer. In this dissertation, however, I am primarily interested in the dialogue between two kinds of texts: a plethora of textual resources (spoken, written, visual) that create and repeat the dominant narrative anew, and the filmic texts as responsive utterances. This creates a problem of balance.

While films are limited in number and I can isolate them as individual textual utterances, the amount of texts produced that have presented a version of – as well as contributed to the shaping of – the dominant, political memory narrative of the war since the 1990s onwards is immense, and would include materials such as political speeches, legal documents, history textbooks, official correspondences, monuments and rituals (such as celebrations of wartime anniversaries), as well as perhaps less obvious political memory-making texts such as media reports on all these materials, op-eds and many others. Such a task would be beyond the scope of any particular project. To make the analysis feasible, this dissertation adopts and modifies Wertsch’s idea of a schematic narrative template (see above).³⁶

The defining moment for Wertsch’s concept is its applicability across different contexts: the narrative template frames different stories of the past, from different periods and geographic locations, into the same basic narrative (see Wertsch, 2013). Here, I modify the idea slightly. The narrative template, as it is employed here, refers to the narrative core of the various specific narratives told about the ‘Homeland War.’ The idea is that, by extrapolating the template from the variety of narratives that talked about the war, I am left with a tangible textual whole – here referred to as the dominant narrative – that the dialogicality can be observed against. My process is thus much more limited than Wertsch’s: instead of looking for the same narrative template across very different texts in different time periods, I look at very similar texts in a very specific period.

The stories of the ‘Homeland war’ were specific narrations of a historical event. Yet they shared some common tenets, expressed in various versions: the core story that both shaped future stories of the war and was itself present in all of them. This schematic template is not necessarily specific to the Croatian case. For one, the insistence on the realization of a national

³⁶ The idea of a narrative template appears to overlap with H. Potter Abbot’s notion of *constituent events* of a narrative (Abbott, 2002, p. 20): the key events that, while they do not exhaust the plot (which can be significantly altered with that Abbott refers to as supplementary events), make the story what it is, constituting its basic tenets.

dream placed the Croatian story into an even wider narrative frame, as it was told in a way that is not unusual in nationalist thinking of state-building (see Jović, 2014) – a larger *framing narrative* (Abbott, 2002, pp. 25–26) of the nation’s desire for independence. At the same time, the template organized a very specific kind of stories – those about the war. Within it, rather than being mere features of particular actors, heroism and victimhood became generic determinants capable of covering multiple actors in the same war context – resulting in multiple stories to be told. The narrative template thus established was as follows:

- the initial situation of Croatia coming at the crossroad to realizing independence
- interrupted by an overpowering (Serb) aggressor attacking the nation, which takes on the role of the victim
- yet through heroism, and against all odds considering a stronger enemy, it resurfaces and defeats the aggressor in a manner that is purely defensive, heroic and just.

The underlying assumption is that, in the Croatian memory space, the template has become both so common and widespread that it makes for a decent stand-in to identifying all individual texts and tracking their dialogic interactions. The template – the dominant narrative – thus serves as a non-ideal, but decent proxy in the undertaken empirical work.

In the template of the ‘Homeland War’, the main type of characters with certain functional trajectories, which can be fulfilled by different personages (see Propp, 1968) is a hero. While the hero is most commonly a soldier, the role can also be played by other characters too. A hero can be a nurse, a mother, a soldier-foreigner (thus differing from the soldier-national, who is the dominant character) etc. This is possible because the narrative template is to an extent generic: it organizes the story both in terms of time (as a point of travel from T1 to T2) and horizontally, allowing for different kinds of micro-stories leading towards victory. This enables holders of different roles (mothers, nurses, politicians...) to become heroes within the complex narrative of the war: e.g. the nurses caring for the wounded supported the efforts in

defending the “homeland” by diligently (and usually with a particular emphasis on their femininity) supporting battlefield operations³⁷.

Other elements of this template/dominant narrative were expanded by assigning them specific characteristics. The power of the aggressor was presented with emotional terminology, but also with a rewriting of history, showing that Serbs were in fact historical oppressors and there was a deeper sense of liberation, as well as animosity at stake (fitting the ‘Homeland War’ narrative within a broader narrative, as mentioned above). Drawing on historical representations, the villain characters acquired known characteristics in terms of representation, with Četnik becoming a trope in the 1990s: the villain as ugly, powerful, and cruel for no reason. Victimization is another example: as was discussed earlier, it ranged from the nation as a victim, to children and women being shown as vulnerable and helpless. The imaginary of “the nation” as a whole was important, for it kept imposing an imaginary unity which gave everything and everyone a meaning bigger than themselves: deaths were national sacrifices, grieving mothers were Croatian mothers (not just mothers of their own sons), and bleeding wounds were not just wounds inflicted on the body, but on the imaginary tissue of the nation.

Defensive and right became and remained, alongside heroic, the crucial determinants of the war narrative. This does not refer to the theoretical distinction between just and unjust wars or situations in starting and fighting the war (McMahan, 2011),³⁸ but rather to the assumption

³⁷ An unconventional but excellent summary of this kind of placing side-characters within a broader narrative can be found on the webpage of Ina Vukić, a member of the Croatian diaspora and a former HDZ Australia secretary. Under the title “Women of Croatia’s Homeland War”, Vukić goes on to list the types of roles women played during the war that “stood out and stand out as heroines of a nation (independent Croatia)”: mothers of those who gave their lives for Croatia’s freedom; women who were at the forefront of caring for the wounded; women – victims of war crime of rape; women who cared about the well-being of war-orphaned children; 23,080 Croat women who actively participated in the Homeland War, assisting in the defence against aggression; many Croat women who worked tirelessly from the diaspora on humanitarian aid to Croatia and lobbying the world for Croatia’s independence; many women who worked as humanitarian aid workers caring for over 800,000 (Croat and Muslim) refugees in Croatia during the war under often dire, always treacherous and difficult circumstances; women who followed a career path that would enhance the path to Croatia’s democracy of tomorrow. Note how these women are not commended for their individual acts (for example, the humane act of caring for children) but are instead commended for a kind of collective action – as women and Croats – for being a part of a collective goal: national victory and liberation. See <https://inavukic.com/2014/03/08/women-of-croatias-homeland-war/>

³⁸ I am grateful to Andres Moles for bringing these issues to my attention.

that, if a war started on domestic territory over the defense of historical territorial unity, everything is allowed – and no action can be questioned, for it immediately attacks the piety, national honor, necessity and heroism involved.

Special attention should be given to one final element of this dominant narrative - its linearity. The claim here is that - to introduce one final term from Bakhtinian repertoire - that template is *monologic*. Monologism is a “situation wherein the matrix of values, signifying practices, and creative impulses that constitute the living reality of language and socio-cultural life are subordinated to the dictates of a single, unified consciousness or perspective” (Gardiner, in Flanagan, 2009, p. 7). Rather than inviting for a vivid dialogue of various memories and presenting the conflict as a multi-faceted story, the dominant narrative in Croatia tries to impose itself as the only possible interpretation of the war experience and meaning, the only perspective, backed up by the force of a parliamentary declaration. The nature of this situation frequently reveals itself (as I show in Chapter III) – e.g. in public debates on the verdicts of the International Criminal tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in which a guilty verdict to a member of Croatian armed forces is seen as a condemnation of Croatia itself and its nationhood. The monologism is reaffirmed through linearity: the narrative must unfold uninterrupted from A to B, start to finish. By keeping the linearity of the narrative intact, every attempt at its stopping, reversal, detour becomes a dismantling of the narrative itself. Detours could be allowed in terms of additional heroic subplots, but not in terms of side-plots, e.g. the Croatian troops committing war crimes. The dominant narrative as it is envisioned is either-or, it must be complete, rounded-up; there is no room for doubt or questionings.

Having defined cultural memory and elaborated on the concepts to be used further in the empirical analysis, I now briefly turn to film – as the medium through which memory shall be observed here – and situate the work within research discussing memory and film both outside and within the Croatian context.

2.1.2 Film and memory

There has been great optimism with regard to the relevance of film for collective (cultural) memory in recent scholarly literature. Grainge begins the introduction to his influential volume on memory and popular film by stating that “[a]s a technology able to picture and embody the temporality of the past, cinema has become central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life” (Grainge, 2003, p. 1). Film has been hailed as “a virtual museum” (Sarkisova & Apor, 2008, p. ix) of history, and a medium that “not only bears witness to important events, but also transmits them in a manner which comes across as more attractive to the general public than any other form of historical discourse” (Mazierska, 2011a, p. 13). Hailed as “the dominant narrative form in the twenty-first century” (Kilbourn, 2010, p. 9) which not only shapes narratives of the past but also provides “a catharsis for viewers” (Sturken, 1997, p. 96), film is by now inherently assumed as relevant in memory-making³⁹ (see Kilbourn’s entry in Branigan & Buckland, 2013 for film studies perspective). This reading of a special place for film in making memory of communities typically points to film’s visuality, which endows them with special powers in representing memory (Kaes, 1990).⁴⁰ This distinct quality of visuality is acknowledged even by those authors who remain more skeptical about film as a memory medium (Winter, 2001, cf. 2017).

How exactly it is relevant, and how films relate to memory, is a matter of more dispute. Michel Foucault’s argued that cinema was, together with television, an effective means of “*re-programming* popular memory” (Foucault, 1974, p. 25) and thus sacrificing authentic, bottom-up counter-memory to official narratives (cf. Brunow, 2015, pp. 9–11; Sturken, 1997). This view has since given room to a more complex interpretation that sees the role film plays as

³⁹ The same goes for history-making; see Jarvie, 1978; Rosenstone, 1988, 2006 for some of the classical works in the debate.

⁴⁰ It is sometimes assumed that visuality can be bypassed for a more tactile connection between the film and the viewer – a quality that is also potentially relevant for memory. On the notion and analysis of haptic visuality, see Marks, 2000; Sobchack, 2004;

potentially multiple. Radstone differentiates three views on the interlinking between film and memory: from seeing “memory as cinema” – meaning film as analogous to the workings of memory – or perceiving “cinema as memory” (as storage, as prosthetic, as a thematizing of memory’s workings through form and style), to a more recent “cinema/memory” relationship which dissolves the boundaries between the two (Radstone, 2010), taking films as “constitutive parts in the process of remembering” (van Dijck, 2004, p. 265, 2007) rather than external memory aides.⁴¹ Along similar lines, Kilbourn distinguishes four interconnected ways in which film and memory engage (Kilbourn, 2013; Kilbourn & Ty, 2013): film as representative of memory; as filmic intertextuality; films as memory contributors in the broader cultural context, e.g. as prosthetic memories, external additions to individuals’ memories that connect them to others (Landsberg, 2004); and “cinema itself as memory, or ‘meta-archive’; ‘prosthetic memory’ writ large; collective cultural memory: the totality of signs and meanings that make up a given culture” (Kilbourn, 2010, p. 45). Others, such as Erll (see above) focus more on films as cultural artefacts that produce (textual and visual) contributions to a wider memory context, including the intertextual remediation between films, but also between films and other media. Erll thus proposes three levels of analysis with regard to film and memory: intra-medial, focusing on how films ‘tell’ history; inter-medial, with a focus on establishing authenticity and ‘stabilizing’ memory representations; and pluri-medial, which focuses on how individual films integrate (or don’t) within wider cultural networks on the way to becoming *memory films* proper (Erll, 2008b; see also Pötzsch, 2011, 2018). Memory films here take on a very specific meaning of films that are seen as actively contributing to collective memory of historical events.

The difficulty of situating this dissertation within such a mapping of points of intersection between film and memory comes not only from different authors’ different maps,

⁴¹ The final category overlaps strongly with what Collenberg-Gonzalez has labelled “the subjective experience” (Collenberg-Gonzalez, 2016, p. 253): cinema explores the processing of traumatic (pre-)memories, filmic memories as prosthetics and media in interaction with the processes of individual remembering.

but also from the disciplinary point of view. Rather than opening itself to theory and methodology of film and cultural studies, this dissertation takes film as another storytelling medium to be “read.” In other words, it does not focus on “innate technologies specific to the form of film itself” (Collenberg-Gonzalez, 2016, p. 250), but rather treats film as one means of storytelling among others, in a manner that privileges what is told (the story) to how it is told. The dissertation does not belong to works that explore the medium itself in relation to memory, either as its representation or a part in a two-way relationship between the individual and the cultural (Bergstrom, 2013; Sutton, 2009; van Dijck, 2004, 2007). It is instead closer to works exploring processing of historical memory through film (Greene, 1999; Pinkert, 2008; Pötzsch, 2011): observing how films question dominant narratives and provide their own. Yet it focuses only limitedly on the power of visuality (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003) that is specific to films. This does not mean that the specific filmic visuality does not matter; film is a unique medium in the way that it brings together various means (not just image, but also sound, editing etc.) to tell stories; it also displays a unique way of organizing and controlling time. Some would argue cinema to be particularly suitable to contribute to memory debates precisely because its formal means resemble mnemonic processes (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003; see also Kuhn, 2010). Yet this does not exclude the possibility that, when it comes to memory, films can also be observed and analyzed as texts in relation to other texts with regard to how they structure their narrative responses, rather than for their memory-resembling form. The analysis offered here is closest to that suggested by Erll, although it focuses less on intra-medial strategies and more on silent inter-medial interactions as part of a dialogical connection between different texts, showing that remediation doesn’t necessarily anchor a memory, but can also subvert it. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter IV, with regard to several films that situate themselves visually within the familiar landscape of the war narrative, only to question the meaning lying underneath it.

2.1.2.1 Scholarly dialogues on post-Yugoslav cinema

There has been simultaneously a lot and a little written about Croatian cinema post-Yugoslavia. The “lot” refers to the number of works that have been produced, in book format or as articles, on Croatia as part of a larger analytical whole: the post-communist world, the region of Eastern Europe, the “Balkans”, the post-Yugoslav countries. The “little” – or rather less, as the passing of time has allowed for a not-insignificant number of pages to be accumulated to this day – refers to works that focus solely on cinematic production in Croatia following the Yugoslav dissolution. Both of these approaches – treating the cinematic production as part of a larger totality (including those less often applied to cinema of smaller countries, such as thematic or stylistic groupings) as well as a single, insular focus – have their benefits and downsides. The latter threatens to perpetuate the “assumption of an essentialist ‘national character’” of national cinema (Imre, 2005, p. xvii). At the same time, it avoids essentialism of a different kind, namely that which assumes that what is crucial when trying to understand films is their geographical source of production or political circumstances, and which posits that patterns of similarity need to be searched (and are incidentally always found) across such common lines.⁴² The fact of being “post” – post-Yugoslav, post-Communist – is that which primarily sparked much of the scholarly interest in Croatian cinema (see Zvijer, 2015). Yet by focusing on patterns of similarities that are expected to arise from these statuses, or from the country’s embeddedness into a wider (geographical or imaginary) space – that of the Balkans (Hirschfeld, 2011), certain things which are specific to Croatian cinema can remain out of focus.

Regardless of the wider framework of observation, a number of authors across disciplines have taken cinema to be “the first degree social and political intervention,” enabling “novel inputs of understanding the world we live in” (Matijević, 2014, p. 8). This idea – that cinema is relevant, socially meaningful to explore, even politically useful – is not new in

⁴²For thoughts on the problem of national vs. regional classification, see Iordanova, 2005.

Croatia: in fact, cinema has long been used as means of propaganda in the country and region, and thus a viable political factor in its own right (Turković & Majcen, 2001, pp. 6–8). This attitude has also been reflected in scholarly work. In her widely cited book on the politics of representation in Balkan cinema(s) during the conflicts of the 1990s, Iordanova (Iordanova, 2001) notes as her primary reason for conducting her research the fact that film is crucial in discourse formation, a fact facilitated by its dependence on images, which are often stronger than words in this regard – and farther-reaching (Iordanova, 2001, p. 5).

Considering its post-status and the relevance ascribed to it with regard to discourse formation, Croatian cinema since the 1990s has primarily been analyzed with regard to its (potential) societal impact – an approach shared also by this work.⁴³ If style was a concern, it was in a way that correlated with the ideology it promoted (Iordanova, 2001; Pavičić, 2011b), culminating in Daković’s recognition of the Balkan film as a particular stylistic model, a genre of its own (Daković, 2008a). The focus among scholars was mainly on the kind of ideology cinema (re)produced during the war (Horton, 2000; Levi, 2007; Vidan, 2011; Zvijer, 2015) or the resistance cinema provided to politics at the time (Crnković, 2006, 2012; Matijević, 2014) – demonstrating the “radical potential of arts” (Crnković, 2012, p. 6) as an “alternative archive” (Vervaeet & Beronja, 2016) – or one it has the possibility to provide when a particular reading is applied (D. Murtić, 2015; M. Murtić, 2012). Only rarely has the focus turned explicitly to memory, and even then a particular kind of memory was in question: traumatic memory (D. Jelača, 2016). Most of these works also share one common tenet. Their primary focus is on cinemas of other post-Yugoslav countries, in particular Bosnia (a country that has had a small

⁴³ Partial exception are studies that discuss cinema from the production side and the building of national cinematographies as systems; here, the ideology, while frequently mentioned as part of the political context, is less in focus, and the emphasis is placed on the ‘post’ as a specific defining moment of a particular (Croatian) cinematography, be it through stylistic ties to the Yugoslav past or through observing the consequences of Yugoslav breakup on the formation of cinematographies as functioning systems. See, e.g. Gilić, 2017; Kurelec, 2012; Pavičić, 2008.

cinematic boom since the war, disproportionate with its earlier situation) and Serbia (where ideological battles through cinema were the most common during the 1990s).⁴⁴

There are several things this dissertation shares with the analyses briefly discussed above. One, it understands films as relevant materials in both building and understanding the sociopolitical context. Two, it is interested in the interplay of aesthetics and politics that happens within them. Yet unlike most previous works, which focus on the aesthetics of depicting ideology, it pushes politics and memory into focus, focusing not just on how films present political events and issues, but rather on what these representations “do” with regard to the collective memory already in place. This is also the reason why this dissertation, unlike most earlier works, does not focus simply on individual films, but on similar strategies otherwise very different films display when dealing with the past: every single film is different, yet how they end up responding to the same narrative of the past can often be rather similar, even if they engage with different characters, plots and ideas. In this sense, this dissertation does a similar move to that Pavičić (Pavičić, 2011b) did in his excellent book, but with different underlying interests: instead of trying to map out coherent stylistic-ideological clusters of films in the post-Yugoslav context, it delegates the stylistic variety into second place of interest and detaches the relationship between style and ideology, only to re-map it again through identifying clusters of similar memory interventions – which sometimes do and other times don’t rely on similar stylistic means. It should be noted that focusing on memory rather than ideology reduces the number of films relevant for my analysis; for while in Croatia nationalist ideology is often spoken of as if it is something reducible to the war situation, there are in fact a number of films (e.g. *Josef*, 2011, dir. Stanislav Tomić) that fit into the same ideological battles, but do not deal with the war at all. Finally, my focus on the post 2001-period allows me

⁴⁴ Perhaps surprisingly, the few analyses looking into Croatian cinema as a separate entity have come mostly from foreign authors, while domestic authors have mostly ascribed to the post-Yugoslav framework; see e.g. Alexander, 2016; Hirschfeld, 2011.

to look at a number of films which have not yet been explored in scholarly literature or have been so only rarely.

2.1.2.2 Film as canon and archive, and the boundaries between them

This dissertation departs from Erll's analytical recommendations in another sense: I study films which are not media of memory in the full sense, at the same time blurring the boundaries between the inter-, intra- and pluri-medial levels. Media of memory are understood, again, as cultural artefacts that transpose their role as mere offerings to the mnemonic community (Erll, 2011, pp. 122–123) and become a staple element of it, as canonized memory media in the Assmann's sense. A film becomes a memory film only if it produces memory, i.e. if it disseminates images of the past which are relevant to collective memory, and which become a part of the society's pluri-medial network (Erll, 2011, p. 137). In other words, it should be seen, discussed, commented on, cited and intertextually represented in other works. This assumption, in some form, lies implicitly behind quite a few studies of film and memory: both film and media scholars (e.g. Cook, 2005; Grainge, 2003; Grgić & Iacob, 2013; Landsberg, 2004, 2015; Sinha & McSweeney, 2012; Sturken, 1997) and historians (e.g. Bodnar, 2001; Fluck, 2003, 2008; Hughes-Warrington, 2007; Toplin, 2002; Zvijer, 2015) frequently focus primarily on films that are visible, widely viewed by audiences or even canonized.⁴⁵ This is the case even when they are skeptical about films' potential to say much meaningful about history or memory at all (see, for example Mico, Miller-Monzon, & Rubel, 1995).⁴⁶ Films studied with regard to memory are films that produce memory.

⁴⁵ It would be wrong to make this an universal rule, however; see for example Chapman, 2005; Kilbourn, 2010; Mazierska, 2011; some, such as Hughes-Warrington (Hughes-Warrington, 2007), note their desire to include a wide pool of films, including also those perhaps less prominent. Rosenstone's (Rosenstone, 2006) position of preferring a more self-reflective mode of filmmaking to Hollywood's 'realism' in relation to history is also an example of rejecting the prominence criteria to an extent.

⁴⁶ A reverse argument can also be made: that much of the historical film in fact deals with already established events, which make it a target to popular audience; see Schwartz, 2008.

This dissertation does not focus solely on memory films in this sense. Instead, I look at the analyzed Croatian films rather as works still finding their place between archive, canon and destruction. They are offered as potential memory narratives, but frequently don't fulfill the conditions for a memory film – or their fulfillment is questionable. The positioning of these films within the memory context (dominated by political memory narrative) shows both the limits and the permeability of the concept of the archive. As dominantly state-supported (through the national film funding scheme) cinema, they are all listed and taken note of, their digital copies stored on various servers (including those of the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, HAVC), password-protected but accessible to selected viewers on demand. As a lot of them are co-produced by Croatian public television, they are also kept there. At the same time, some have already, in the brief time, slipped through, with some unavailable for further distribution even to the producers,⁴⁷ and others not kept in the institutional system designed to promote and assist national cinema, despite their public successes. Some have become a part of the domestic cultural canon: winning awards at prominent festivals, shown as part of special screenings with the participation of national cultural institutions – yet have at the same time been rejected from cultural memory. Simultaneously, however, the discussions they have raised in public – often even before the first domestic screenings – have often become part of the memory processes, bringing into question the films' isolation from the memory canon. What is canon and what is archive is thus still, to an extent, a process of negotiation.⁴⁸ More importantly, as this work shows, films are not meaningful to memory only as memory films. For one, as I propose in Chapter VI, films do not have to create, but can also help maintain an environment of memory

⁴⁷ As told by several producers to the author in the process of data collection.

⁴⁸ An excellent example of a film canonized in cultural memory is Vinko Brešan's *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku* (*How the war started on my island*, 1996). In the film, a version of the beginning of the war is presented that is staunchly opposed to the dominant political memory narrative of hatred and aggression, dissipating it rather in chaos, confusion and bureaucracy. The film's images and citations have, since its release, taken on a prominent role in how this period is remembered, although they are still in the position of vying for a 'dominant story' place with the more politically influenced cultural memory narrative.

without offering a narrative of their own. Two, the connection between film and memory is not worth exploring solely for what films bring to memory. Studying film can instead support pre-existing ideas about a particular kind of memory environment, as is the case in this thesis.

2.1.3 The disciplinary positioning of this dissertation

Memory studies exist at present as a discipline-in-making, but also as a multidisciplinary research field, in which methodological and conceptual tools from various disciplines are frequently brought together in individual projects. This dissertation is no exception, adapting ideas from film studies, literary scholarship and cultural studies, history and sociology. Its primary anchoring, however, is in political science, although it does not take over much from it conceptually. My primary problem is political: what kinds of relationship to the war do films help produce or maintain? The concern with memory is thus mobilized by the concern for the way it shapes present-day political reality, and the way(s) films are a part of that process. In terms of how this work thinks about memory as a political process, it is thus complementary to the works such as Ashplant, Dawson and Roper's (Ashplant et al., 2000), who try to provide a framework of understanding how different modes of memory become political (in their terminology official) in commemoration processes. Working on war memory and commemoration, the authors point out the interconnectedness between various memory narratives, emphasizing how even individual memories are not independent of state narratives, but are often framed by them. Theirs is thus an example of an explanatory framework that not only places great emphasis on narrativity of memory and the role of "templates" (2000, p. 34) that help shape personal memories – the "cultural narratives, myths and tropes... frames through which later conflicts are understood" (2000, p. 34). It also fits the Croatian case quite well, as it helps explain how in Croatia "all individual, sectional and oppositional narratives are created in relation to and communication with the official one" (Banjeglav, 2013b, p. 8). While this

dissertation does not start from the idea of fully formed narratives on all levels, its starting point is precisely the assumption of domination of a certain singular narrative.

Regime change is seen as a topic *par excellence* for studying memory, and in particular the role memory might play in periods of transition and its contribution to the processes of transitional justice – an interdisciplinary field that includes, but cannot be limited to the questions of political science.⁴⁹ The relationship between political memory and pursuit of transitional justice has been discussed in the literature on the post-Yugoslav countries (see Subotić, 2007), under the premise that official memory efforts in the region support incompatible, antagonistic narratives of the past that hinder rather than enhance efforts to pursue justice (Subotić, 2016). The opposite would be desirable: for public memory to assist justice pursuits by integrating facts and victims’ stories from the legal and other truth-establishing processes, thus validating the victims and creating narrative memory bonds between sides in the (former) conflict, while also serving as a reminder of committed atrocities - and thus hopefully also a deterrent (e.g. Subotić, 2016, pp. 122–123). Yet while memory is a necessary input of legal proceedings, as “legal processes depend on the memories of victims and other witnesses and because remembering the mistakes of the past is supposed to be an important factor in preventing future injustices” (Neumann & Thompson, 2015, p. 10), it is not by default also its output. There has been some optimism with regard to how much legal processes can do to memory narratives (Osiel, 1997; Teitel, 2001); yet there has famously also been great skepticism (Arendt, 1994) – and rare empirical research in the area of former Yugoslavia shows that courtroom narratives are rarely co-opted into memory narratives (Ristić,

⁴⁹ The concept of transitional justice, for example, originally developed in connection with dealing with the consequences of repressive regimes post-regime change to democracy; yet it evolved over time into covering also the issue of crimes committed during armed conflicts, as well as the processes of post-conflict reconciliation and remembrance (Delaye, 2015; Fischer, 2016b, p. 11; Teitel, 2003), although some define only a fragment the latter to constitute transitional (or “interpersonal”) justice, as opposed to “formal justice” (Bar-On, 2007), adding to the terminological confusion. On the disagreement within scholarship on the normative goals of transitional justice, for a brief overview see Dimitrijević, 2013.

2014, 2018). And even under the optimistic assumption that there is a meaningful role for memory to play in the processes of achieving justice (and its complementary process, post-conflict reconciliation; see Rigney, 2012), what could cinema do? While assertions are frequently made that artistic practices do have a role to play in the process of dealing with the (recent) past (Fischer, 2016a, p. 257; Rush & Simić, 2014), the specificities of that role are often left unspoken. This dissertation thus does not make any categorical statements about the relationship between film, memory and justice, nor does it explicitly engage with the process of transitional justice, reconciliation or – in the broader sense (Fischer, 2016a) – dealing with the past in Croatia. I return to this question very briefly in Chapter III, discussing the role of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in memory-making in Croatia. It here suffices to say that I do share a certain – at least theoretical – optimism with regard to the impact cinematic dialogue and contestation (or reinforcement) can have on memory narratives, and the result of those narratives on the processes of processing the past, keeping in mind Assmann and Shortt's assertion that "memory is not only susceptible to changes, it is itself a powerful agent of change" (A. Assmann & Shortt, 2012, p. 4).

2.2 Methodological framework

2.2.1 Outlining a method

The question about the meaning of the term collective (cultural) memory is inseparable from the question regarding the best way to study it. Is memory predominantly a national (as in Nora's work), or transnational (A. Assmann, 2018; A. Assmann & Conrad, 2010; De Cesari & Rigney, 2014), transcultural (Erll, 2012, 2018) or cosmopolitan (Levy & Sznajder, 2002) phenomenon? Should it be studied bottom-up by asking people how they remember certain events, as collective memory is always the memory of individuals who live together (Winter & Sivan, 1999)? Or rather in a more horizontal fashion that separates and analyzes artefacts that

help constitute the memory of those individuals? These and related methodological dilemmas are not automatically resolved by situating oneself between the poles of “collected” and “collective” memory, as recognized by Olick in his attempt to give direction on the issue (Olick, 1999). Thus, this section situates the dissertation methodologically, explaining the research process.

2.2.1.1 Data collection, organization and pre-analysis

The corpus of primary data includes all Croatian feature fiction films made in the period between 2001 and 2014. The term *Croatian* here implies films that were produced exclusively with funding through a producer from Croatia, or for which a Croatian company or individual was listed as the majority co-producer. The list of films was assembled using the Croatian film catalogue, available publicly from the Croatian Audiovisual Centre⁵⁰ (Hrvatski audiovizualni centar, HAVC), which includes detailed production information on all listed films. Such a pragmatic choice allowed for a relatively simple selection of data, setting aside the ongoing academic debates on the problematic of conceptualizing national cinema (see Crofts, 2000; Higson, 1989, 2005; Hjort, 2005; Hjort & MacKenzie, 2000; Vitali & Willemen, 2006; Walsh, 1996; Wayne, 2002). *Feature-length* films are those of duration of 60 minutes or more, as defined by the Croatian film lexicon.⁵¹ A *fiction film* is here understood as one that is telling a fictional or fictionalized (e.g. biopic) story. The fictional nature of films means that they mediate and shape reality rather than document it. The HAVC classification was taken as discriminatory, and only works of fiction (in Croatian better categorized as “igrani film”, roughly translated as performed, film that features declared actors’ performances) were included in the primary data.

⁵⁰ See <https://www.havc.hr/hrvatski-film/katalog-hrvatskih-filmova?godina=2018> for the latest edition of the catalogue, searchable by year of production.

⁵¹ Entire content available online; see <http://film.lzmk.hr/>

All (available; see below) films were collected (in different formats) and stored on a home server, available for viewing, whenever that was possible; the remainder were stored on DVD or through acquired digital links. Films were obtained through various sources: through contacting producers, private contacts, online searches, as well as through online torrent pages. In several cases, DVD purchases were made, and later supplemented with a digital version as well. To keep track of the collected films, an Excel spreadsheet was created, with title, director, scriptwriter, production name and contact, as well as official summary (if available) and any other extra notes entered for each film.

To assist the process of (pre)analysis, technical (Zvijer, 2015) instruments of film analysis, as defined by Aumont and Marie (Omon & Mari, 2007), were used. Instruments of film analysis are a set of instruments that enable the researcher to organize the research material, acquaint herself with it and advance into the research process. Instruments of film analysis can roughly be divided into descriptive, citational and documenting instruments (Omon & Mari, 2007). While these instruments were designed for film analysis (primarily in film studies), the primary aim of this dissertation was not to situate the films within the historical or theoretical debates in film studies, but rather to understand their societal embeddedness (observing films as cultural artefacts belonging to a particular society at a particular time and place, which primarily meant focusing on their textual and contextual meaning). Therefore, only those instruments were used that were deemed helpful in the project. This refers primarily to the description of film images (2007, pp. 62–63), which meant describing the relevant film frames and sequences, including characters, setting, their lines, but also elements of film style (e.g. the length of a particular shot), and any other notes that seemed significant at the time of viewing. The notes on this process were entered into the same Excel table, enabling adding or corrections to previous notes – many of which were then used in the writeup stages of chapters IV to VI. This process is never neutral or exhaustive, as film image is always polysemic, meaning it

carries multiple meanings (Omon & Mari, 2007, pp. 64–65), and only those are selected that are in the focus of the researcher. Moreover, the process of translating film images into words is always interpretive, resulting in selectivity and exclusion of certain meanings. To support to the first stage of the process, screenshots of certain filmic images were also taken where possible, and notes were made on the dialogue spoken (in line with the authors' identification of citational instruments; Omon & Mari, 2007, pp. 70–76).⁵²

Out of the 153 films made in the period, 8 were unavailable, and were thus left out of the data corpus, while one film (*Happy endings*) was unavailable in any kind of storable form yet was still included in the corpus after two cinema screenings were attended. 33 further films were left out from the data corpus on the count of being minority co-productions, meaning they were majority-produced by a company or individual from a country other than Croatia (and also frequently, but not always, directed by a foreign director, in a foreign language). This also excluded Serbian-Croatian minority co-productions from the analysis, but not Croatian productions that have Serbian or other foreign companies listed as minority co-producers, leaving a total of 112 films on the data set list.

A fair amount of secondary data was also collected: all available feature fiction films made in the period 1991-2000. This was supplemented with newspaper articles including film reviews, director interviews and other news that helped situate the films within the public debates. Yet this data was not analyzed in a systematic manner but served rather as contextual material in preparing the analysis. A process of preliminary watching and getting acquainted with the data preceded the analysis. During this time, I viewed all collected films (period 1990-

⁵² Aumont and Marie list a lot wider range of materials to be documented, from those belonging to the pre-distribution stage (such as script, filming notes if possible, etc.) to those in the distribution stage, including reviews, available literature etc. (Omon & Mari, 2007, pp. 77-79). In this case, collected materials included mostly distribution-stage data (with the occasional exception of the literary work adapted into a film), which were used as secondary sources assisting in analyzing film materials where possible.

2014), some multiple times, to get familiar with the data. Primary notes were also made during this period, including on several potential codes.

2.2.1.2 Thematic analysis

During the first stage of analysis, the aim was to identify the main themes that appear in the films of the observed period (2001-2014), with a particular – but not exclusive – focus on societal issues. What do the films thematize as relevant topics? Is the focus more on broader societal issues (for example, unemployment, economic and political transition) or more on intimate stories (e.g. love stories, coming-of-age); or both, with one being told through or with the other? Finally, does the war appear as a topic in some sense, and how prominently?

The dissertation relies on thematic analysis, as understood by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). As a foundational method that is at the same time flexible and adaptable to various kinds of data, it can be used to organize the data, as well as to offer in-depth insight and “describe the data set in (rich) detail” (2006, p. 79). Here, however, it was chosen primarily to help organize the data in the first step by identifying thematic patterns, provide the answer to what themes dominate the films and whether the ‘Homeland War’ was among them, and help the researcher plan and organize the second step in the analysis. The research question was thus posed very widely, which is a slight departure from the standard uses of thematic analysis, in which the themes “capture... something important about the data in relation to the research question” (2006, p. 82) – a situation which was here present only minimally, because a referential point was not given as part of the question (What themes are present in films?).

Thematic analysis can be conducted “bottom up” or “top down”, meaning that themes can be identified either inductively, with strong emphasis on the data, or deductively, propelled by a theoretical framework and concerns (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 83–84). This dissertation

started from an inductive position, as the process of analysis was done through re-watching and trying to get a sense of the data without a prior theoretical framework in place, although previous reading on politics and memory in the country instructed the analysis to an extent, as did my own memory and experience (as I had seen some of the films before, and had a particular interest in films unrelated to academia). Yet by the second coding stage, enough background information was accumulated that certain ideas started to take on more prominence, although still without a clear theoretical framework. While themes are easy to see as “arising from the data” or “waiting to be spotted,” the process of watching films was in fact not one of “spotting,” but of interpretation. Such is the case with all data; but it is particularly emphasized in the case of film, which is a medium that includes a plethora of characters, subplots and thus themes. The aim was to remain at the level of “emphatic interpretation” (Willig, 2014), which does not try to unravel hidden meanings, but rather to emphasize the presented ones, searching for themes on a semantic or explicit, rather than latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This stage of the analysis thus mostly stayed at the level of basic description (ascribing meaning to certain scenes, characters etc., or simply listing the main stories of the films), with slightly more abstract themes being constructed only at the final coding stages, as required by the process of moving from identifying to a more abstract pattern-making (needed to provide an organization of the data). But the process of watching is always limited in what it can reveal, and further viewings would have perhaps resulted in more (or different) themes (on relationship to data, see Mauthner, Parry, & Backett-Milburn, 1998). While the process of analysis included paying attention to various elements that constitute a film text⁵³, it was also surely incomplete, and relied significantly on the previous knowledge (and limitations) of myself as the coder. Finally,

⁵³ For example, Mikos recognizes five levels to pay attention to when doing film analysis: content and representation; narration and dramaturgy; characters and actors; aesthetics and configuration; and context (Mikos, 2014). In at least four of those the question is the content of the film itself, and how to analyze it.

the process of ‘translating’ film images to textual codes and themes was limiting, as it necessarily required a translation of one rich medium into another.

Out of the total corpus of collected primary data, thematic analysis was conducted on a data set of all available films made between 2001 and 2014, except those excluded listed above, totaling 112 films (see Appendix I). Films were viewed in chronological order,⁵⁴ and coded with a broad brush, looking for a few dominant themes rather than focusing extensively on details. As films tend to cover many motives, the hardest part was to decide how and what to code. While some codes were derived directly from the material, others were influenced by the read literature, covering mostly works on the political and social processes in the country during the 1990s, as well as the collected materials related to films. A few of the codes were thus developed in advance⁵⁵ (e.g. coming-of-age, which was expected to appear as the main topic in a number of films categorized as youth and/or children’s films). As the data analyzed were audio-visual materials, which were not susceptible to standard practices that follow coding procedures (e.g. printing out the segments or coding in a software), an alternative method of coding was devised: once a code was assigned to a segment of data (or in some cases to the total data unit), it was entered into the Excel table made for the films, usually with a note of the

⁵⁴ This was done as much as possible. As the research process started, most of the data was collected by the end of a designated period, but not all. Some films had to be viewed later on, and some were later received in better versions or resolutions. At certain points it would also happen that some films would receive more public attention (e.g. at certain points there were new discussions related to the film being screened on TV), often leading to an additional viewing later on. The linearity of the analysis process should not be overstated.

⁵⁵ This also included a code for ‘Bosnia’, which referred to films that thematized the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1991 and 1995. As the pre-analysis revealed that several films deal with the war in Bosnia and are thus not directly relevant for the topic of this research, yet their number and content was both interesting and indicative of a pattern. While the war in Bosnia was not in the scope of this research, this was done for two reasons. One, the involvement of the Croatian troops in Bosnia, while repeatedly recognized by several institutions including the ICTY, is still officially denied in Croatia, and often conflated with the statement that the ‘Homeland War’ was thus solely defensive. Although the two conflicts could in fact be treated as separate, the matter is important for political reasons: if there was official involvement by the state of Croatia in the conflict, and if the aim of that conflict was in fact the expansion of Croatian territory onto parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina that was at that time majority Croat populated, then the solely defensive nature of Croatia’s war efforts overall was no longer defensible. It was thus interesting to see if this problem is thematized at all. Two, had there been thematization of the Bosnian conflict, it would have been interesting to see how it was thematized. Enough films were found to form a separate thematic category, the analysis of which was not pursued further, although it does show some interesting specificities; see Conclusion.

scene, sequence, character relationship, or sub-story that prompted the coding, or a descriptor of the scene in some sense. As timestamps did not prove particularly helpful in the process, they were quickly abandoned for a more description-driven approach to coding.

After the first round of coding for most films, an initial list of potential themes was drafted. The dataset was then reviewed again, this time trying to change/adjust existing codes, fitting them into themes or creating new ones where needed, and coding also those films that posed difficult to code in the first stage. Thematic analysis demands that the whole dataset is coded during the first stage of analysis. Yet while I strived to code all the films at approximately the same time, this was not possible for two reasons. One reason was that just the amount of material for viewing meant there was quite a gap between the first and the last film coded, which inevitably made some difference to the quality of coding. While notes were kept on the features associated with certain codes to keep differences in coding at a minimum, they were not always equally helpful, in particular since the coding process was also a learning process. Two, several films in the count were obtained at later stages of analysis, whether as a first copy or as a better copy (easier to view/code), meaning sometimes adjustments had to be made retroactively, going back to previously viewed films to re-assess them for a new code.

The final part of the first stage of analysis revealed a number of themes that dominated the data; many of the films contained two or more listed themes, and there were also themes that were not noted down, as they appeared in only one or two films. As most of them were not further pursued in the second stage of the analysis, only a brief summary will be given here. The illustrative films listed here for a particular theme are not necessarily all films that included the theme; e.g. the topic of transition appeared in many more films than are mentioned here.

The most common societal theme was that of *transition*: a term used to describe the transformation from a non-democratic to a democratic political system and from the specific Yugoslav version of socialism to Croatian capitalism. The topic of transition appeared in a

number of versions (and subsumed the largest number of the used codes), but its single most dominant feature was the underlying sense of loss. The loss was primarily economic, a sense of no opportunity for the younger generations. In *Ravno do dna (Straight to the Bottom, 2001)*, a group of young friends become engaged in killing out of boredom and unemployment. In *Vlog (2014)*, a young man unable to find employment or connect with anyone tries to reach out to the world through a video-blogging channel. The second transition-related topic often repeated was that of *breakdown of societal values*. This also came in various versions. In *Ljudožder vegetarijanac (Vegetarian Cannibal, 2012)* a ruthless, corrupt doctor poses as a functioning member of society, questioning what is “normal behaviour” in present-day Zagreb. *Kosac (The Reaper, 2014)* focuses on the lack of ability to forgive and reconnect since the war. Inversion of normalcy upside-down is literally presented in *Doktor Ludost (Doctor Frantic, 2003)*, in which various characters enter a psychiatrist’s office and it is no longer possible to tell who has a diagnosis and who doesn’t. *Ajmo Žuti (Go Yellow!, 2001)* portrays corruption ruining not only the local football team, but also long friendship between individuals. At the heart of it is a feeling of absence of civility, order and morality in society: ideas that gets played out in a number of different ways. This included portraying the normalization of criminality as something to laugh at (*Lopovi prve klase/First Class Thieves, 2005; Cvjetni trg /Flower Square, 2012*), with laughter being used as a defense mechanism. On a darker note, the breakdown is presented as a complete loss of identity and moral values, invariably tied to a kind of servility to “the West” (as in the films of Tomislav Radić). *Ta divna splitska noć (A Beautiful Night in Split, 2004)* shows the deterioration and sadness in the city of Split seen through both local and foreign eyes. *Takva su pravila (These Are the Rules, 2014)* outlines the disappointment in the victory of the bureaucratic system over the individuals. A sub-theme here are films that openly thematize the lack of tolerance for any kind of difference, be it through present-day stories (a

lesbian couple in *Fine mrtve djevojke/Fine Dead Girls*, 2002), or historical figures (the deaf painter Slava Raškaj in the heavily stylized film *100 minuta Slave/100 Minutes of Glory*, 2004).

Transition has also brought a sense of *the dismantling of civic responsibility*. It comes in two dominant forms: either as servility to the EU, or “The West” (*Infekcija/Infection*, 2003), or as disappointment with corruption and destruction in local politics (*Visoka modna napetost/Tension*, 2013) – and occasionally both, in a critique of not so much political structures as citizens for their passivity and playing along (*Projekcije/Projections*, 2014; *Šuma summarum/Forest Creatures*, 2010). Occasionally, this latter political breakdown and the social breakdown would overlap in one film, as in the tale of medical charlatanism that doubles as a metaphor of a society believing “mythical” narratives in *Pravo čudo (True Miracle)*, 2007).

Along similar lines is the topic of *past in the present*: a set of very different films that used historical stories from different time periods to comment on the present, be it by instilling the fear of the left-wing politics through repeating versions of the anti-Croat sentiments (see Chapter III), as in *Josef* (2010) and *Tri priče o nespavanju (Three Stories about Sleeplessness)*, 2008), or by promoting a story of the ‘homeland’ set in the past, as in *Duga mračna noć (A Long Dark Night)*, 2004). Finally, *regional differences/specificities* was a prominent theme that often integrated within itself the various stereotypes or oppositions (local-international, island-land, male-female etc.), as in *Posljednja volja (Last Will)*, 2001), *Sonja i bik (Sonja and the Bull)*, 2012), *Oprosti za kung fu (Sorry for Kung Fu)*, 2004), *Što je muškarac bez brkova (What is a Man Without the Mustache)*, 2005) etc.

There were also a few more intimate themes that kept appearing across the dataset. *Love* was a prominent one, though it often felt more as a catalyst to other themes than one in its own right. Coming of age was another. This included both the process of growing up and slowly learning about the world (thematized in many of the children’s films) and also a few less obvious versions of the same idea, such as the coming together of two female friends in their

late 30s who both need to figure their life out (*Zagreb Cappuccino*, 2014) or the accidental meeting of two girls from different class backgrounds for an unexpectedly wild night out (*Fleke/Spots*, 2011). *Father-son relationship* appeared unexpectedly frequently, as a literal theme that often signaled a necessity of a rupture, a different path for the son (*Serafin, svjetioničarev sin/Seraphin, the Lighthouse Keeper's Son*, 2002; *Ispod crte/Under the Line*, 2003; *Ničiji sin/No One's Son*, 2008; *Pismo ćaći/A Letter to My Dad*, 2012) or a metaphorical one, where a relationship between a man and a boy came to symbolize a deep alienation of the main character and the inability of the world to fill it (*Preživiti u Riju/Hibernation in Rio*, 2002; *Put lubenica/Melon Route*, 2006).

But what kept showing up as a theme across these and other films, was the ‘Homeland War’. It was difficult to code, as it would appear as a detail here and there, and then as a central topic in the next film: war crimes, war heroism, soldiers’ relationships, the fall of Vukovar, war victims, war in the present, disappointed veterans were just some among the vast number of codes that were assigned and re-assigned to films in the process. In the end, four thematic subgroups were identified: films *processing the war (the war as a major theme/the war as explicit memory)*; films *treating the war as a silent (unspoken-of) theme*; films *referencing the war from the present (war as a minor theme)*; films using *the war as a context*. The first group refers to an active engagement, working through the war, regardless whether this was done critically, or with endorsement. In these films, war was often explicitly treated as memory: memory for the characters or memory for the viewers, but definitively a thing of the past in some sense. The second group captures the war as a silent underlying factor that appeared as a burden to the characters, something beyond their control, a fact they couldn’t speak of or that kept coming back haunting them in the present. The third group refers to the war as something the characters seemed to “work through” between themselves, but in a way that revealed their reluctance to engage with any pressing questions. Finally, the last subtheme refers to the war

used as a background mention to everyday life, frequently to emphasize its relation to other themes (transition, breakdown of societal values, interpersonal relations, etc.).

This strategy of dividing the major theme into subthemes by how much relevance the war had for the films is not entirely in line with a proper thematic delineation, and could have also been done by teasing out more specific subthemes (e.g. war crimes, post-war veterans' stories, war stories based on historic events etc.); yet during the process of analysis, attempts to tease out more specific themes systematically had not proven to be particularly fruitful: as the thematization of the war was complex, more would be left out than captured, and it was difficult to move beyond the level of coding. Thus, the decision was to split the one major theme – 'Homeland War' – into four primarily by the war's prominence within the film.

According to the thematic codes that covered them best, four subgroups of films were thus devised for further analysis. Each included all films that covered that particular subtheme, regardless of other themes that have appeared in the film. The list of films can be found below in Table 1.

Films processing the war (as past/memory)	Films treating the war as the silent theme	Films referring to the war (from the present)	Films treating war as context
Svjedoci (Witnesses, 2002)	Tu (Here, 2003)	Dva igrača s klupe (Two Players from the Bench, 2005)	Polagana predaja (Easy Surrender, 2001)
Nije kraj (Will Not Stop There, 2008)	Projekcije (Projections, 2013)	72 dana (72 days, 2010)	24 sata: Sigurna kuća, Ravno do dna (24 Hours: Safe House, Straight to the Bottom, 2001) – the Sigurna kuća segment;
Ničiji sin (No One's Son, 2008)	Kosac (The Reaper, 2014)		Preživiti u Rijju (Hibernation in Rio, 2002)
Zapamtite Vukovar (Remember Vukovar, 2008)			Ispod crte (Under the Line, 2003)

Crnci (The Blacks, 2009)			Seks, piće i krvoproliće (Sex, Booze and Bloodshed, 2004)
Korak po korak (Step by Step, 2011)			Ta divna splitska noć (A Beautiful Night in Split, 2004)
Projekcije (2013)			Oprosti za kung fu (Sorry for Kung Fu, 2004)
Broj 55 (Number 55, 2014)			Što je muškarac bez brkova (What is a Man Without the Mustache, 2005)
			Što je Iva snimila 21. listopada 2003. (What Iva Shot on 21.10.2003, 2005)
			Put lubenica (Melon Route, 2006)
			Volim te (I love you, 2006)
			Trešeta (2006)
			Karaula (2006)
			Kradljivac uspomena (The Recollection Thief, 2007) *
			Kino Lika (Lika Cinema, 2008)
			Metastaze (Metastases, 2009)
			Ljubavni život domobrana (Love Life of a Gentle Coward, 2009)
			Neka ostane među nama (Just Between Us, 2010)
			Šuma summarum (Forest Creatures, 2010)
			Fleke (Spots, 2011)

			Ljudožder vegetarijanac (Vegetarian Cannibal, 2012)
			Hitac (One Shot, 2013)
			Kratki spojevi (Short Circuits, 2013)
			Most na kraju svijeta (The Bridge at the End of the World, 2014)
			Happy Endings (2014)
			Sveci (Saints, 2014)

Table 1: Categories of 'Homeland War' themed films

*The film marked with an * was excluded from further analysis due to the inability to obtain a better copy, which was needed for a more in-depth analysis.*

To conclude, the first stage of the analysis showed not only that the war is a highly prominent, frequently articulated topic (going hand-in-hand with such related issues as political and economic transition and the impression of breakdown of societal values) but revealed four broad ways in which it appears as a theme. The aim of the next stage of the analysis was then to find a way to better understand the vague thematic patterns spotted in the first stage. Films of the war-related thematic groups (listed above) were then taken and analyzed in more detail, constituting the smaller, second-stage main data body.

2.2.1.3 Making sense of the thematic groups: Observing the dialogue

As was mentioned earlier, the first stage of (thematic) analysis resulted in four thematically grouped categories of films (see Table 1): all the films that referenced the theme of the 'Homeland War.' The second stage of analysis was then dedicated to "making sense" of this pre-selected data – a total of 38 films – still driven with the same overarching question: what it is that (some of) these films "do" that makes them contested in public, and more generally, how to approach the relationship between these films and war. This process initially included going back to both the selected groups of films and to secondary literature and probing for a

meaningful explanatory framework, which would enable a more interesting insight into the data apart from just noting that the films deal with the war in various ways. The back-and-forth process eventually led to adopting a modified version of a framework employed by James Wertsch in his work on collective memory, built around the idea of hidden dialogicality as a process of negotiation between narratives and responses (as explained in the earlier section, see above). The challenge was then how to transfer this idea into practical research. First, a schematic narrative template was extrapolated using original sources and secondary literature (see above; also Chapter III). The four theme-delineated groups of films were then analyzed with this template in mind.

The process of analysis was again twofold. As the war was perceived through its dominant memory narrative, the challenge was to find a way to observe the dialogicality throughout different films, which differed significantly both in story, plot and visuality. At the same time, the focus was not on the style of the films, genre or other characteristics which would be observed in standard film analysis (Lewis, 2014; Omon & Mari, 2007): these were seen as contributors to the films' memory-impact, and not as a research interest in themselves. Moreover, considering the amount of collected material, as detailed of a focus on formal elements would have made the analysis too detailed and complex to move from the level of individual films to a more general insight across filmic texts that I was interested in.

Instead, films were viewed as complete units of analysis, and the focus was first placed on the total of the story they produced. I devised a set of notes on what the common representations of the dominant narrative were and/or could have been. These derived from literature, from looking at available visual materials from the period – including the 1991-2000 filmic production that was watched earlier in preparation for the first step of analysis⁵⁶ – but

⁵⁶ There were, in fact, rather few films about the war during the 1990s, a situation that has attracted different explanations: from the fact that most filmmakers didn't want to compromise their art with propagandistic work, to lack of film funding and absence of really relevant battles that could be turned into filmic narratives (see Zvijer, 2015, p. 160).

also from personal memory of the war. These familiar examples of mediation were not seen as exhausting all possible options, but rather as a guideline on some of the expected possibilities. Following the thought and documentation process related to the dominant narrative, films were then observed for their responses to that narrative in their style, story and plot. What was searched were instances of silent filmic dialogue – the “silent dialogic rebuttal” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 107) – that could be seen as attempts to deconstruct parts of the template/dominant narrative, expand on it, reaffirm, change or subvert it in various ways.

Wertsch’s reading of Bakhtin’s idea of hidden dialogicality required a consideration of both formal (textual) elements and contextual (relational) filmic meaning. By formal elements I understand the standard elements that are a part of film analysis: the narrative structure (plot and story order) and characters (types, motivations etc.) in particular, but also mise-en-scène, camera, sound and editing (see Lewis, 2014), to an extent they were used to contribute to the meaning the film conveyed with regard to the topic. This allowed asking the questions such as: is the plot linear or not; who the main characters are; what their relations and main features are; what the settings are (rural, urban, wartime, post-war etc.), as well as more detailed questions about the role of certain elements of the film in creating a message (e.g. positioning of the characters within a scene to signal power, domination etc.).⁵⁷ The focus was primarily on the story, as well as on two elements: the process of turning the story into the plot (the key events, and how do they play out) and the characters. I paid special attention to any appearances of the principal character of the dominant narrative, namely the soldier-hero. This stage required a lengthy process of viewing and reviewing the film materials, often going back to certain scenes to re-evaluate and correct my original readings.

⁵⁷ To provide an example that I discuss in more length in Chapter IV: in one of the films, *Projekcije (Projections)*, the positioning of the camera when showing the characters' point of view indicates an equality between all characters, including those that perceive each other as more/less powerful in comparison to others. In *Broj 55 (Number 55)*, the shot showing Serb soldiers from the perspective of a Croat soldier lying on the ground immediately establishes the impression of a „more powerful enemy,” which is in line with the dominant narrative.

By contextual meaning, I assume the totality of the formal elements and the meaning they produce in relation to the dominant narrative: in other words, what can the films be taken to mean in the particular constellation they exist in, considering the text they are replying to. The move is here from the films' own form and style – what is the story they are telling, and how? – to their form and style as embedded within a wider societal context, and the meaning they take within it: what does this story “do” in relation to another story? The emphasis thus shifted away from the building blocks of individual films to the kinds of responses – what I have labelled *strategies* – they take towards something external: a pre-existing narrative. The questions asked were thus changed accordingly: e.g. how does the employment of a familiar story differ from that of the dominant narrative; in case of material remediation, what role does it play in the narrative; how the characters compare to those of the dominant narrative in characteristics, motivations, etc. The underlying assumption was that the dominant narrative – to some extent – contributed to the organization of the filmic narrative, and the question became how this organizational role could be understood. The process was thus similar to that of narrative analysis. In case of both narrative analysis of film (Omon & Mari, 2007) and the more constructivist streams of narrative analysis in human studies which look at how individuals construct narratives of their existence (Riessman, 2008), the aim is to identify and understand the role of narrative structures in the shaping of the text. Constructivist narrative analysis also addresses narratives as dialogically constructed and inseparable from the social context (Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2014), which sits with the emphasis on the dynamic and contextual specificity of the utterance adopted here from Bakhtin.⁵⁸ Yet the analysis conducted here was not narrative

⁵⁸ Among the most complex background questions with regard to this thesis is the tension between what is essentially a version of limited narrative analysis and the Bakhtinian rejection of semiotics with regard to the static nature of language and narrative structure that cannot capture the dynamics of the utterance, and in fact rids the analysis of that which is the most important in language, namely its individual, contextual usage (Morson & Emerson, 1990; Stam, 2000b, pp. 185–212). One way out could be to point out, as Lešić-Thomas does (Lešić-Thomas, 2001), that it is wrong to reduce Barthes' work (most responsible for modern structuralism, as well as post-structuralism and narrative analysis) to the decontextualized structuralism that is frequently ascribed to him. Rather, as she emphasizes, already in *Mythologies*, Barthes' intention is to “to unmask the myth by showing the political and social reality behind it” (2001, p. 112) rather than to conduct an analysis that separates the structure

analysis in the full sense; rather, it worked as a kind of limited-scale narrative comparison, in which stories, plots, and characters were compared in search of relational relationships, observing how “structures of films function in the framework of the communication processes they are bound up in” (Mikos, 2014, p. 410). In some cases (see Chapter IV), the story, plot and characters were the main building blocks in the dialogical process; in others, the structure of the filmic narrative was characterized by the space it left for the dominant narrative, rather than by reproducing it (as a schematic template) or directly responding to it – a relational connection that was more difficult to tease out and harder to interpret (see Chapter VI). Also, the process of analysis was not, as the above description may imply, always linear, moving from what the films say to how this relates to the dominant narrative; sometimes it resulted in going back and forth between the film and the template, especially if the filmic references to the war were minor or a relatively undeveloped part of the story.

Films in the same group according to thematic analysis were analyzed consecutively, under the assumption that further analysis might discover further similarities. This was confirmed in two cases, in which the thematic groups also became the groups exerting the same strategies. Two groups were eventually combined together under one broader strategy, with several sub-strategies identified.

All this was done under the assumption that the public space is so saturated with a particular kind of memory narrative, that “all individual, sectional and oppositional narratives are created in relation to and communication with the official one” (Banjeglav, 2013b, p. 8) –

of the materials (commercials, rituals, images etc.) from their sociopolitical context, a purely synchronic endeavor. As Barthes’ examples of image analysis would be meaningless if they didn’t take context into consideration (the salutation to the French flag is a meaningless act unless one comprehends the national context, as is the name Panzani without the socially constructed implications of “Italianness”), so would Bakhtin’s own work be impossible without precisely those contextual determinants onto language. The same question becomes even more complex when applied to film, a medium that is commonly analyzed textually (Omon & Mari, 2007) with the assumption that the basic tenets of semiotics, as well as Barthes idea of code can be transferred to cinema, although even the most dedicated analyses (including those by Christian Metz) have not managed to fully transpose these to cinema. This thesis recognizes the complexity of the debates yet does not offer either a solution or a definitive commentary.

including cinema. The analysis process in the second stage thus meant bringing in a lot of assumptions about how films should be observed in the particular context. This, however, is not specific to this thesis. In qualitative analysis, the analysis is always a process of construction, rather than discovery, which is conditioned by the assumptions the researcher brings into the process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). This includes the selected methodology, which cannot be treated as simply a toolbox without predispositions (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013), and is instead built with theoretical ideas in mind. In this study in particular, the theoretical assumptions about the memory context and dialogicality significantly shaped the results. This was further emphasized by the specific positioning of myself as the researcher: coming from the country from which data is being analyzed, having had personal experience of the war discussed and having lived through the processes of narrative-shaping and change, I inevitably brought my epistemological and other assumptions to the process even before engaging with the literature in a more complex manner, and was immersed – willingly or not – into the narratives I analyzed. This also made the research process longer at times, as my own interest in and engagement with the narrative made it harder to work with certain filmic narratives. Finally, the “meaningfulness” of film does not exist as a separate entity, but is created in the research process (Mikos, 2014, p. 410), meaning the results of the analysis were also to an extent framed by the research process and interest.

What was then expected of the responses in such a dialogical relation? This dissertation takes as the expected outcome the answer demonstrated by Tulviste and Wertsch (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994) on the example of individuals responding to history/political memory narratives: in absence of a coherent narrative source analogue to that of the state, responses tend to be fragmentary, incomplete, narrative segments rather than full narratives. The official narrative thus continues to organize the response, even if it is in fact being rejected (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994, p. 327). Utterances by individuals are here not considered to be equal to filmic

texts; but they are comparable to an extent, as historical speeches and history books tend to provide a more uniform version of historical narratives, while responses to them that come from less structured and targeted processes tend to offer a more focused version of events. It is, for example, very unlikely that a film will emerge that tries to tell the ultimate story of the war, and more likely that different films will present smaller narratives and respond to different elements of the history-books story.

2.2.1.3.1 *Final notes on the research process*

To conclude, three things should be noted. One, while the analysis tries to take into consideration the progression of the narrative over time (both in discussing films by date of their making and by taking into consideration the evolution of the dominant, political memory narrative), relying on a narrative template makes the analysis inevitably static: the narrative template/dominant narrative can serve as a proxy for empirical research precisely because it is stable over time. The process of films grappling with the gap between the narrative and events of the war has, in contrast, been neither linear nor static thus far. But as this dissertation is less interested in the diachronic evolution of filmic images in response to the dominant narrative template, and more in finding horizontal patterns that explain the general strategies groups of films take in their dialogue with the template, not all those dynamics could be captured in great detail. Wherever possible, diachronic elements were taken into consideration, and this was noted in each of the empirical chapters.

Two, while there is little doubt that power relations do exist between the two levels of text-production (including the fact that films in Croatia are still funded predominantly through a system that is state-budgeted rather than market-based), the question of institutionalized power is not front-and-center in the analysis. In fact, it is assumed that the films that have been made during the period of analysis were not a result of political pressure or abundance/lack of funding in any targeted sense. While very little work has been written on the funding and film

production post-1990s (Gilić, 2017; Kurelec, 2012), there is little reason to believe that particular forces of repressing or promoting certain approaches systematically were in place in the given period.

Three, Wertsch's notion of textual communities as groups that use the same sets of texts (Wertsch, 2002, p. 62) helps explain why the optimal unit to study in terms of war memory is here only one nation (and state): as the war was presented as an ethnic conflict, it was the narrative-imposed ethnic distinctions that, albeit often bypassed and tweaked (see Đurić & Zorić, 2009), served as bases for different stories, which then became grounds for different templates. However, that the stories were told as ethnic stories does not mean that ethnic groups were their natural origins. As I discuss in Chapter III, the illusion of ethnic division was plotted and imposed (Gagnon, 2004), and ethnicity did not work as somehow a "natural" dividing means, but was rather used to create a line of division. This meant that ultimately in memory, most stories that do not fit the simple struggle between "us" and "them" – Croats and Serbs – have been repressed. This has been long assumed in the vast literature of the conflict; yet thus far there has not been, to my knowledge, any attempts to observe whether – and if so, how – cinema has tried to bypass that illusion of natural ethnic divisions. This dissertation tries to correct for that by introducing the notion of *narrative ownership*, which it maps out across the analyzed films. Under narrative ownership, what is observed is the collective perspective that gets to claim the war as "its own". This is not a matter of focalization or framing, nor is it a matter of the voice of the narrator. Rather, I try to tease out what kind of collective ownership the story of the war has: when a certain film presents a perspective on the war, whose perspective is that? Who is included into whose story, and who has a claim to it? The aim is to see which groups are presented in Croatian-made films as legitimate bearers of the war story – or, if the films do not specify such groups, what that could mean in terms of memory overall. I thus, as part of the analysis, look whether characters' ethnicity is specified, and if so, why; if

characters of different ethnicity are presented, how are they depicted: is their role active or passive; are they “the other” or do they share the destiny of the other characters; are they entitled to their own story, or do they serve as a catalyst for someone else’s, and if so, whose? The concept of narrative ownership, derived through the process of acquainting myself with the data and literature and then returned into analysis, is thus a sensitizing, probing concept (Blumer, 1954; Patton, 2015), which was used to guide the analysis from the ground-up. The aim was, however, not to devise a theory, but to learn a bit more about how films include or exclude certain groups from memory, and how those included/excluded groups are delineated in films.

To summarize, this chapter set the stage for researching films as part of the collective memory processes in Croatia, by both defining what it assumes under collective (specifically cultural) memory and offering a breakdown of the methods employed in the research. It argues that, in the specific Croatian case, where the memory debate has been so strongly shaped by a particular narrative (the coherence of which can be attributed to its political nature, and the core of which can be extrapolated as a narrative template/scheme), studying cultural memory is best done through studying its dialogicality with that dominant narrative. This dialogical interaction should be seen through the prism of narrative dialogicality and variation, taking as the starting point a very minimal set of narrative features as relevant: story, characters, the process of story emplotment. Thus, the emphasis is on moving from studying media of memory by themselves, or in interaction with other media of the same kind (Erll, 2008b) and in the process of becoming, to a process of cross-media analysis that reveals how films respond to, modify, reveal or endorse the dominant narrative even when they are not in fact media of memory proper, but pieces somewhere between the canon, archive and forgetting. The results of this process are presented in chapters IV to VI: in short, according to their strategies of responding to the dominant narrative, I identify three groups of films - *films dealing with the past*, and the remaining two

into *films bypassing the past* and *films assuming the past*. Prior to elaborating more on this, however, the burden of proof that the Croatian context was indeed one of a heavy saturation with a particular narrative which would warrant such a methodological approach lies on this dissertation. My claim is here that during the war, a narrative was created to describe it; it then became the narrative of political memory, which also became a template for any other remembering of the war. It is the work of arguing for this that is undertaken in the next chapter.

3 CHAPTER THREE: NARRATING THE ‘HOMELAND WAR’

The previous chapter set up the theoretical framework. It also set up a framework for analysis, elaborating why it approaches the relationship between films and memory as a process of hidden dialogicality and how tracing that dialogicality is to be done through analyzing filmic narratives and observing their relations with what I call the dominant narrative of the ‘Homeland War’ (an extrapolated schematic template that embodies the narrative’s the key elements).

This chapter takes on two interconnected tasks, exploring the development and affirmation of the dominant narrative through time. It consists of two parts. In the first part, I provide a brief summary of the facts about the ‘Homeland War’. In the second part, the forming and evolution of the dominant narrative about the war is sketched, tracing its dynamics. The chapter has two aims: to provide insight into memory discourse(s) in Croatia concerning the war, and to make a convincing case for the dominance of a particular narrative, thus justifying the dialogical approach to analysis.

3.1 The story of the conflict

In this subsection, I offer a brief introduction into the key moments and facts of the war. This segment does not presuppose that a value-neutral retelling of the war is possible⁵⁹. Rather, I limit the story to the established facts as much as possible, to identify the events that later would be used as features of the creation of the dominant memory.

The timeline of Yugoslavia’s breakup should start at least with Tito’s death in 1980, if not earlier, with the consequences of the economic crisis and the change of constitution in 1974. The remainder of the timeline included student riots in Kosovo in 1981 (over education and economy, but also the status of Kosovo within Yugoslavia), reformist tendencies (most notably

⁵⁹ On the problematics of telling history, see e.g. Munslow, 2012, 2014.

in Slovenia) asking for greater autonomy to the republics, and Milošević's rise to power that was in large part owed to mobilization based on fear, populism and nationalist sentiments (assisted by the SANU memorandum and constitutional revisions that further reduced the status of Kosovo through centralization).⁶⁰ It culminated in January 1990, when Croatian and Slovenian members of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia⁶¹ walked out of its Fourteenth (extraordinary) congress, leading to the collapse of the League (see Bilandžić, 1999). The congress was to reform the League and allow it to function as a multi-system (in line with the political shifts at the time, most notably the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe). Yet following the rejection of all proposals coming from Slovenia, it instead marked the end of League, giving a strong push towards the end of Yugoslavia. The breakdown of the Yugoslav Communist Party was followed by acceptance of political pluralism and free elections by the communist parties of the federal units. The armed conflicts that followed, however - starting in Slovenia, escalating in Croatia (1991-1995), continuing in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and reaching Kosovo during the second part of the decade (1996-1999)⁶² – were not a direct and unavoidable consequence of the Yugoslav dissolution.⁶³

On April 22nd, 1990, the first round of the first multi-party election was held in Croatia, at that time still part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ), the strongest contender to the Communists, the SKH-SDP (*Savez komunista Hrvatske - Stranka demokratskih promjena*) won 42% of the votes. Under the majoritarian electoral system, HDZ obtained a 58% majority (205 seats of the 351 available). The party's victory changed the stakes for the local Serbs – at 12,2%

⁶⁰ For an overview of the arguments, see Baker, 2015. For specific arguments, see Glenny, 2012; Goldstein, 1999; Petak, 2003; Ramet, 2002, 2005, 2007; Silber & Little, 1996.

⁶¹ Savez komunista Jugoslavije.

⁶² If the 2001 Macedonian armed conflict is included, the wars can be said to have entered the 2000s as well.

⁶³ There are thus differing narratives of blame for the conflicts. Some place the blame exclusively on Milošević's nationalism; others include Tuđman's territorial pretensions in Bosnia; many start from what they see as an unavoidable eruption of ethnic hatred that could have only ended in bloodshed (a specificity of the long-exoticized Balkans; see Todorova, 2009), while some present the conflicts as a calculated elite project (see Gow, 1997; Ramet, 2014; Žunec, 2007).

of the population, the largest ethnic minority group in Croatia at the time (Koska, 2004). In the atmosphere of political leaders building national tensions, the success of the HDZ was presented by local Serbian politicians supported from Serbia as denial of the constitutionally guaranteed status of the Serb ethnic group.⁶⁴ Inducing this fear was used as a tool for mass mobilization of the Serb community in Croatia against the new government. At the same time, the more nationalist parts of HDZ portrayed the dissatisfaction of the local Serbs as a predicament endangering the creation of an independent Croatian state (Brubaker, in Koska, 2004) – which by then felt imminent. After the elections, the Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka*, SDS⁶⁵) started advocating full political-territorial independence of the Serbs-populated parts of Croatia. The request received strong backing from Serbia, although it came as a surprise to many of the Serb-majority municipalities themselves (see Gagnon, 2004). It also gained support of the Yugoslav National Army (*Jugoslavenska narodna armija*, JNA), which by that time had already sided with the Serbian nationalist policies of the Milošević regime.⁶⁶ Arms were being funneled on both sides and tension slowly building up, although the official Croatian policy was still one of negotiation with the local Serb population on their

⁶⁴ A good illustration of why the Serb minority feared for its status was the fear over its citizenship status. In the former Yugoslavia, all citizens had both federal – Yugoslav – citizenship and republican citizenship; yet the latter didn't matter much in practical terms, allowing individuals to live anywhere as equal citizens. As Yugoslavia started breaking apart, this was brought into question, especially since Croatia and Serbia in particular started mobilizing heavily along ethnic lines, and the matter of citizenship became a source of possible discrimination. The most relevant here is the change in the definition of the new state, which went from being defined as “a national state of the Croatian people, state of the Serbian people in Croatia and state of nationalities living on its territory (Art. 1)” in the constitution under Yugoslavia to “the national state of the Croatian people and the state of members of other nations and minorities who are its citizens” in the 1990 constitution (Štiks, 2006, p. 487). Implications that such a change will occur existed already in the election period, instilling fear of a change of status for the local Serb communities. On the complicated citizenship regime in Yugoslavia and after, and what this meant for different groups, see Štiks, 2006, 2010.

⁶⁵ The SDS was established in Knin in February 1990 as the party of Serbs in Croatia. It participated in the 1990 elections only in Knin and surrounding areas, due to its late organization. Yet the political activity of the local Serbs was expressed through a mass meeting of Serbs in Petrova Gora, gathering “tens of thousands” of Serbs from Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, who expressed disagreement with the political programs of political parties in Croatia and, according to Goldstein, also expressed “Greater Serbian aspirations” rejecting the idea of the breakup of Yugoslavia (Goldstein, 1999, p. 214). As context, according to the 1991 census, there were some 581 000 Serbs in Croatia, mostly concentrated in the four largest towns (Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek). For an excellent chronology of Serb political activity in Croatia, see Žunec, 2007, sec. 3.

⁶⁶ Already in May 1990, the JNA started pulling back weapons from its territorial defense centers (*teritorijalna obrana*, TO) in Croatia and Slovenia, leaving the weapons only in Serb-majority areas.

position within Croatia. Following the elections, the Croatian parliament, *Sabor*, promulgated amendments to the existing constitution on 25th of May, introducing the office of the president and ministers while removing the “socialist” from the state name and confirming new state symbols (Goldstein, 1999). The new flag and other state insignia quickly raised controversy regarding their historical symbolism. Particularly controversial were the alleged ties between the red and white chessboard - associated with Croatia since the 15th century - and its visual similarity to state symbols used by the Fascist puppet state *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* during World War II (see also Đurašković, 2016b; Pavlaković, 2008c, 2017b; Sindbaek, 2012, p. 190).

Subsequently, Franjo Tuđman – former JNA general turned dissident and historian – was elected president of – then still Socialist Republic of – Croatia by the Parliament on the 30th of May 1990. Two months later, on the 25th of July, the *Declaration on the Sovereignty and Autonomy of the Serbs in Croatia* was passed, founding the Serb national council (*Srpsko nacionalno vijeće*, SNV). The Declaration rejected the constitutional changes, calling for a referendum on Serb autonomy based on the right to self-determination. The referendum took place on August 19 and September 2nd. Voting was limited to “rebel Serb regions” and it failed to include a significant percentage of citizens of Serb ethnicity living elsewhere in Croatia. The support for autonomy was near-unanimous, although at this point it was still referred to primarily as cultural autonomy, and not a desire for a separate state within Croatian territory (see Trbovich, 2008, Chapter Four). The Croatian leadership’s attempts to stop the rising revolt by sending policemen to Knin (one of the cities with the largest percentage of Serb population) triggered the so-called “log revolution” (*balvan revolucija*), a series of roadblocks against police intervention, in the summer of 1990, kicking off the armed conflict (Goldstein, 1999, p. 218). The proclamation of autonomy of Serb-majority municipalities followed on the 30th of September 1990, as the Serb Autonomous Region of Krajina was declared.

On 22nd of December 1990, the new Croatian Constitution, known as the “Christmas Constitution”, was adopted by the Parliament. The constitutional preamble established the Republic of Croatia as a “national state of the Croatian people and the state of members of other peoples and minorities, that are its citizens,” relegating the Croatian Serbs from their status of a constitutive nation (held in SFRY) to that of national minority. The constitution also revised the state insignia, to differentiate them from Ustaša heritage (see footnote 74 below). A parliamentary decision regarding the nullification of federal laws and regulations diminishing Croatian sovereignty followed. A country-wide referendum over independence was held on the 19th of May 1991, with 85,56% of the voters voting for independence, and 92,18% against staying in Yugoslavia (Hrvatski sabor, n.d.). On the 25th of June that same year, Croatia (and Slovenia) announced its dissociation from the SFRY (Rudolf, 2013; Sabor, 1991). The declaration of independence, halted upon request of international mediators, came into force three months later (Odluka (1265), 1991). Croatia was internationally recognized as an independent state on the 15th of January 1992, following the opinion of the Arbitration Committee set up by the European Community that Yugoslavia was “in the process of dissolution” (Pellet, 1992).

By this time the war was already raging. The Croatian National guard (*Zbor narodne garde*, ZNG), a predecessor to the Croatian Army (*Hrvatska vojska*, formally *Oružane snage Republike Hrvatske*), was formed in the Spring of 1991. Never officially declared,⁶⁷ the beginning of the war is commonly dated back to July 1991, following a sequence of smaller-scale armed conflicts. The JNA became progressively more involved on the side of rebel Serbs. Secession from Croatia had been announced by the Executive Council of the Serb Autonomous

⁶⁷ The war in Croatia was never formally proclaimed, although general mobilization was announced on the 23rd of November 1991. The reasons for this were explained by Tuđman in a BBC interview in 1994: it was simply “not in our interest”; everyone already knew of the open conflict with the Yugoslav army, and the declaration of the war could have, it was feared, lead to “demoralization among the Croatian people” and give a positive boost to the Serbs in Knin and elsewhere (Senjković, 2002a, p. 192).

Region,⁶⁸ and the Republic of Serb Krajina (*Republika Srpska Krajina*, RSK) was proclaimed on 19th of December 1992. The local Serb population was pushed⁶⁹ into war primarily through Serbian⁷⁰ leadership's strategy of building fear (Human Rights Watch, 2006), strengthened by paramilitary units arriving from Serbia (the so-called *Četnici*) and the JNA. The war was thus "a combination of internal armed insurrection of extremist Serbs and an external intervention by the regular army, JNA, and Serb paramilitaries" (Zakošek, 2008, p. 592).

Effectively frozen since the January 1992 ceasefire agreement, but intersected by occasional outbursts of violence, the war was eventually brought to an end in August 1995, following two large-scale military operations, *Bljesak* (Flash) and *Oluja* (Storm) (Žunec, 1998). These operations were carried out with the aim of liberating territories still held by Serb rebels. By this point, the rebels were significantly weakened by the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had, since its beginning in the spring of 1992, occupied much of the previously available military personnel and resources, effectively pacifying a large part of the combat areas in Croatia. There was also a change in official policy on the side of the Milošević regime, which distanced itself from the Serb leadership (see Barić, 2005, 2008). *Oluja* freed and reintegrated the so-called UN sectors "North" and "South" back into Croatian territory. Following the military operation, however, the area became a site of unwarranted looting, house-burning and killing of Serb civilians, mostly elderly, by Croat military forces (Barić, 2004; Odbor, 2001). The armed conflict finally ended through negotiations between the warring parties in November

⁶⁸ Three Autonomous Districts (*Srpske autonomne oblasti*, SAO) were proclaimed in Croatia: one in Knin (formed in August 1990, soon after the HDZ electoral victory, taking over a more informal entity of a similar kind established on the same territory a month earlier), one in Western Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sarmia (June 1991), and one in Eastern Slavonia (August 1991). By 26th of February 1992, the territories were brought together into the *Republika Srpska Krajina*, which had already pronounced independence (evolving from SAO Krajina, in the Knin region) without including all the SAO parts.

⁶⁹ On the narrative construction of the rebellion from the Serb side, see Pavlaković, 2017; Žunec, 2008.

⁷⁰ For reasons of simplicity, I use the terms 'Serbia' and 'Serbian' throughout this thesis. The term, however, refers to a country that has belonged to four different entities: the republic that was part of the SFRY before its dissolution through Croatia and Slovenia proclaiming independence; the state that was part of the union between Serbia and Montenegro, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Savezna Republika Jugoslavija*, SRJ/FRY) 1992-1995; the Confederation of Serbia and Montenegro between 2003-2006; and the single-state Serbia following the Montenegrin declaration of independence in 2006.

1995 in Dayton, Ohio; peaceful reintegration of the occupied Croatian territories was agreed in Erdut on the 12th of November that same year.

The war left deep consequences on Croatia's economy⁷¹ and demography.⁷² The country also started the process of democratic transition – and there was now a war to be narrated and integrated into the collective identity of the newly independent political unit. It is the content and development of this narrative that I examine in the rest of this chapter: how events became a usable narrative, which then became memory.

3.2 Creating the narrative of the ‘Homeland War’

The previous subsection offered a chronology of key events of the armed conflict in Croatia. In this section, I explore how those events were narrativized both during the war and in the post-war period, when the created narrative went from being a description of the present to narrativized memory. I look at the dominant actors, instruments and processes of creating and sustaining the political, top-down narrative of the war.

3.2.1 The story during the war

During the war years 1991-1995, the country's leadership was engaged in a process of reinventing the idea of the country as a political unit, distancing it from the Communist heritage and establishing a new identity narrative. This was done on the basis of pursuing a politics of “national reconciliation” (Đurašković, 2016b; Søberg, 2006). Instead of actively engaging with the heritage of the Communist past and the conflict between Communism and Fascism during WWII, the new leadership led by Tuđman decided to gloss over these topics for the sake of creating national unity. Negative parts of communist heritage were ascribed to Serb partisan

⁷¹ See Schönfelder, 2008; for a quick overview of economic indicators, see Zakošek, 2002, p. 9.

⁷² There are still no conclusive numbers for how many casualties there were in Croatia. Two institutions - Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata (HMDCDR) and the NGO Documenta – are currently completing projects on the number – and identification – of all casualties. In preliminary information given to the press, the HMDCDR estimated the losses at between 20 000 and 22 000 people (as cited in Zebić, 2018). The most recent estimate by Documenta places the count slightly lower, at 17 007 (Documenta, 2018).

troops, in particular when it came to the two great divisive moments in Yugoslav history, Jasenovac and Bleiburg (see footnote below); a policy of not prosecuting perpetrators of crimes during the WWII period was pursued (Đurašković, 2016a). This strategy, which enabled Tuđman to mobilize support (and funding) from the Croat diaspora – in large part descendants of Ustaša supporters – also served to make arguments for continuity between the NDH and the new Croatian state, although this was not part of Tuđman’s intentions.⁷³

Tuđman, while keen on using historical symbols and subscribing to the idea of Croatia as a nation historically “seeking statehood” (Đurašković, 2016b, p. 116), spent a large part of the 1990s creating a new national narrative. At the center of this new narrative was the

⁷³ The newly independent Croatia’s relationship with the NDH - the Ustaša-led, Nazi collaborator Croatian state (see Tomasevich, 2001, Chapter Six) - was fluctuating between condemnation and mild endorsement (see Sindbaek, 2012). In his book *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*, Tuđman famously referred to the Jasenovac concentration camp – the Ustaša camp for Communists, Serbs and other minorities during WWII – as a “work camp,” trivializing it and trying to minimize the number of victims (Biondich, 2004, p. 70). He also, during the First General Congress of HDZ, presented the NDH as “an expression of the political desires of the Croat nation for its own independent state” (Đurašković, 2016a). The rehabilitation of NDH was not Tuđman’s intention (Đurašković, 2016a, p. 5). But his policy of national reconciliation, which included presenting both Ustaša and Croat Partisans as “opposing fighters who supported the very same goal of Croatian national freedom,” as well as “forgetting the past” through equalizing Ustaša and Partisan legacy in respect of both merit (for building an independent Croatian state) and guilt, prevented an objective discussion on Ustaša crimes (Đurašković, 2016a). The new narrative included presenting Yugoslavia as a project of Greater-Serb hegemony, separating the period of independent Croatian Partisans’ struggle from the state that arose from it, as well as nationalizing the role of Tito, who was seen as a protector of Croatian interests in the SFRY. The reconciliation policy, influenced by Tuđman’s ties to the emigration (Pavlaković, 2010b), thus enabled a rehabilitation of Ustaša as fighters for Croatian independence. It also allowed for drawing parallels between present and history, and the 1991 aggression as the continuation of Bleiburg - the other sensitive place of national memory, refers to the killing of NDH soldiers and civilians after they surrendered and were released to the partisans as prisoners of war.

Tuđman never articulated this connection (Đurašković, 2016a, p. 11). Yet the right-wing of HDZ and some minor political parties (Pavlaković, 2008b) adopted it, and it became a legitimate public narrative, serving HDZ in voter-winning strategies. Official state actions assisted this. Commemorating victims of Bleiburg on the site became part of the official politics. In 1995, as the Sabor took over organizational duties, a commemoration was held in the Croatian Parliament. Tuđman himself never attended the commemorations (Karačić et al., 2012, pp. 108–109), and HDZ did not have a representative there between 1991–1994 (Pavlaković, 2008a, p. 29). The government did, under international pressure, start distancing itself from the Ustaša legacy slowly after the war ended, including a 1997 apology to the Jewish people for crimes committed during the NDH. The 2000 change of governing party also brought a change in the official relationship to Bleiburg, with an attempt by the new government, led by Ivica Račan, to de-politicize the site (becoming the first Croatian prime minister to visit both Bleiburg and Jasenovac), while subsequent HDZ governments continued visiting and funding the commemoration, but with an Europeanized value turn which included removing some radical-right monuments glorifying the Ustaša regime. Yet the declarative anti-totalitarian orientation, officially proclaimed in the 2005 Declaration on Antifascism (see Deklaracija o antifašizmu, 2005) was put to questioning by the Sabor frequently awarding large sums of money to the Bleiburg commemorations in subsequent years (Pavlaković, 2008a). “Flirting with Fascism” (Pavlaković, in Blaško, 2017) opened the door to interpreting Croatian identity within a narrative that ties it to the NDH. It has continued to present day, e.g. in the 2018. statements of the Minister of Veterans and representative of the office of the President, on the occasion of burial of both victims of Communist rule and NDH soldiers, that these victims are all the same (Hina, 2018).

interpretation of the war as necessary, just, and defensive. Croatia was simultaneously portrayed as a victim and (eventually) a victor, dominating over a superior opponent. Already in 1991, Tuđman insisted that the war was an “aggressive war” of the “Republic of Serbia” against Croatia, in which Croatia was “forced to fight a battle of life or death, for the survival of the Croatian people” (Tuđman in Engelberg, 1991, cited in Žunec, 2007). This understanding was given official backing through parliamentary acts, starting with the two parliamentary *Conclusions* in 1991 – a practice that will continue through multiple parliamentary declarations (see section below). The *Conclusions* spoke of “open aggression” by the “greater Serbia Četnik rebels”, a “concealed, horrible and dirty war” but also the heroic struggle, in particular that of the “heroic [city of] Vukovar” which “must not fall” (Zaključci (1266), 1991; see also Zaključci, 1991). The claims of an overwhelming, destructive force of the aggressor and the local heroism of immense proportions, became two key elements of the official narrative.

Why did this idea of national victimhood and aggression come to be? Žunec (2007) notes that defining the war as an aggressive life-or-death situation imposed from the outside had multiple purposes. It aimed to identify a clear enemy and organize a coherent defense accordingly; to gain international sympathies through the victim status and legitimize the country’s right to defense (then-disputed through an UN arms embargo⁷⁴); and to define the war as a clear international conflict which “entails clear sanctions for the aggressor and simultaneously opens for the victim the perspective to be recognized as a sovereign state” (Žunec, 2007, vols. 1, 127 translation my own). The narrative also helped achieve internal homogenization and mobilize support for both the war and HDZ.

⁷⁴ The embargo was in force for all countries of the former Yugoslavia since September 1991, but had a stronger impact on Croatia, as Serbia had access to JNA military resources. For details, see the Resolution 713 (United Nation Security Council, 1991).

In his study on the reshaping of political space in the former Yugoslavia,⁷⁵ Gagnon, in the process of elaborating how the “old” Yugoslav elites attempted to create ethnic tension and war in order to keep their power-positions in the post-Yugoslav space, also points out to the (self-) victimization as an important part of the war narrative. This idea dominated the public space during the war - together with proclaiming any oppositional or challenging voices to be “anti-Croat” (see more on this below).⁷⁶ The victimization included looking back at the historical grievances that were re-articulated during the war to affirm the discourse of oppression and victimhood (see Pešić, 2002), e.g. claiming that post-war Yugoslavia was no different than the pre-war “Greater Serbian regime”, existing at the Croats’ expense (see Vasiljević, 2008); and – more interesting from the perspective of this dissertation – looking at the specific production of victimhood during the war, often building on several cases of wartime destruction, e.g. the fall of Vukovar and the shelling of Dubrovnik (Sokolić, 2018, p. 59). The two sides in the war were, the self-victimization narrative posited, clear: the attackers, meaning Serbs, members of JNA and paramilitary troops, and the victims defending themselves, the Croats. Because Croatia was simply defending its territories, all actions on the Croat side were considered legitimate. This attitude was epitomized in the claim by the Supreme Court judge Milan Vuković that in a defensive war, it is impossible to commit a war crime (see Pavelić, 2011). It became the official stance of the state until the government change in 2000, when the discourse on war crimes became more complex and politics less present in war crimes prosecutions (*Praćenje suđenja za ratne zločine: Izvještaj za 2005. godinu*, 2005).

⁷⁵ The study focuses on *demobilization* as the strategy old Yugoslav elites used to keep power – building a nationalist narrative (constructing ethnic hatred) and silencing and marginalizing political opponents through fear. Radicalization and demobilization processes were fueled by the right wing of the HDZ and conservatives in the ruling structures in Serbia, in alliance with the radicals of the Croatia-based SDS, to change the political landscape. Violence was used to achieve a two-stage change in political space: short-term, inducing fear to silence and marginalize those who disagreed with holders of power, establishing the new borders of “our” political community. Long-term, to turn these new borders into political reality (Gagnon, 2004, p. 181).

⁷⁶ “The HDZ...vigorously denied accusations of war crimes leveled against their own forces. Anyone who questioned these stories or who criticized the president or the ruling party on the war or on domestic policies was demonized as being in league with the enemy, or not caring about the innocent victims of the evil others” (Gagnon, 2004, p. 179).

Stories of national victimhood were perpetually retold. As a consequence, by the time the war ended, a narrative was established: the ‘Homeland War’ was seen as “a miracle” in which Croats, unjustly attacked, “with almost bare hands managed to successfully defend three quarters of the state territory” (Đurašković, 2016b, p. 130). But the narrative of (self-) victimization was not just re-told; actions were so designed or avoided to affirm it and fit within it. During the war, the atrocities committed by Croat forces (often linked to the ruling party) were not processed (Gagnon, 2004; K. Petković, 2013). Similarly, during the military operations of May and August 1995, state-controlled media vehemently denied that the Croatian forces had undertaken any atrocities in earlier operations, repeating that the rights of all Serbs from the region would be fully respected this time as well (Gagnon, 2004, pp. 48–49).

The process of arriving at this narrative included a complex combination of media control, careful framing and rewriting history, creating a new symbolic universe (see Zakošek, 2000). Most media in both Croatia and Serbia were in the service of political propaganda (Vasiljević, 2009, p. 149). This was often due to direct political influence, including legal restraints (Kurspahić, 2003; Malović & Selnow, 2002), although part of the public also expected biased reporting (Turković, 2000). After Tuđman was elected president, he broke the promise of freedom of speech and press made during the campaign, and started to control and discipline the media. The means of media control included installing HDZ-loyal media personnel; steering media companies into state hands or those of select (“friendly”) private owners, including reversing the privatization process where deemed necessary; monopolizing airwaves to prevent the creation of new stations, while also obstructing the work of existing private electronic media; limiting media freedoms through laws and decrees; intimidating journalists and using state-owned media for attacks on those acting independently (Kanižaj, 2011; Thompson, 1999).

As a result, the media narrative that emerged in Croatia in 1991-1995 was relatively stable, and went beyond just victimization: it was dominated by issues of legitimacy, statehood, just war, and the victimhood of Croatia attacked by the Serb aggressors (Vasiljević, 2009, pp. 156–157). The “us-them” distinction was emphasized, although it did change slightly with time, with categories of “good” Serbs occasionally appearing in the press (Đurić & Zorić, 2009). Stories appearing in Croatian TV news during war years were predominantly those of “victims” (34,4%) and “heroes” (31,2%) (Zakošek, 2000, p. 113). Victimhood was presented predominantly in collectivist terms, with emphasis on the suffering of the country and the nation as a whole (Car, 2009, p. 119; Zakošek, 2000). The fall of Vukovar on the 18th of November 1991 became the symbolic embodiment of a victimized country, as well as the ultimate symbol of the courage of the Croatian soldiers (Banjeglav, 2013a; Kardov, 2006).

Rewriting of history was also used by the media in the creation of the new national narrative. Parallels were drawn between Serb rebels and the old Četnik troops, portraying the war as a near-repetition of Bleiburg (see Kolstø, 2010), prevented only by the courage of the Croatian army (Sindbaek, 2012, p. 191). Since the summer of 1991, Croatian Television referred to the JNA as a “Serbian Četnik army”; the terminology eventually settled mostly for “Serbo-communist army of occupation” (Vasiljević, 2008). Media narratives about heroes of “future history” (Đurašković, 2016b) defined the war as the key moment in the long battle for an independent Croatian state. The war became the “cardinal theme” (Đurić & Zorić, 2009) of the nation, the key event in the realisation of its centuries-old dream.

Visuals played a crucial role in the process of identity-building during the war. The “branding” was particularly interesting in the representation of the soldier, with attempts to create the image of a young, rebellious, film-inspired, rock star-like rightful defender (Vitaljić, 2013, p. 48). This aesthetic of young men, borrowing from Hollywood films, was often in collision with the more traditional HDZ values, e.g. nation, reconciliation, Church (Senjković,

2002a, p. 198). The imagery of the soldier propagated by the media was not entirely different from the soldiers' self-perception though: in interviews conducted by Senjković (2002a), the soldiers talk about the Hollywood-image of the soldier – Rambo in particular – as defining their own images. But the narrative of the war as a film spectacle was very different from the actual experience of the battlefield. It was, however, a convenient framework for the media to use. A premediated representation of the memory of the Vietnam war served as basis for designing the present of an entirely different conflict. For journalists, novelists and filmmakers, the soldier-image drew on previous media images and was often framed through them. One thing the image of the domestic soldier was not allowed to convey, however, was defeat. Showing dead bodies on the Croatian side (military or civilian) was explicitly forbidden (Vitaljić, 2013).

All these images of the war were not created only top-down and disseminated by obedient media; the war was absorbed into the whole society. Confectionery producers made candy boxes decorated with maps of independent Croatia and issued chocolates with Croatian Army stickers. Graffiti conveying messages covered the walls (Ključanin & Senjković, 1995); pop songs immortalized “hero cities” and revolved around “God, mother, home” (Baker, 2010). Literature perpetuated the image of the punk soldier (Senjković, 2002a), and certain symbols, such as the rosary, were turned into essential parts of the war narrative – even if neither matched the soldiers' testimonies (Car, 2009, p. 119). Gradually, following military successes, the brave, kind, “movie-like” Croatian soldiers were placed into more victorious narratives. What remained unchanged throughout was them winning over a stronger enemy in a just, defensive war. Moreover, the enemy was occasionally depicted not just as more powerful and brutal,⁷⁷ but also a long-term one, reshaping narratives of Yugoslavia and beyond to anchor the ongoing conflict as a long-term grievance between Croats and Serbs (see also below).

⁷⁷ Cvitan summarizes this in her discussion of memoirs of one of the most prominent Croatian generals and ICTY indictee Janko Bobetko, regarding his descriptions of the enemy: „The enemy as enemy: he is always multiply stronger, has miraculous weapons and tools, and always arriving backup“ (Cvitan, 2002, p. 103).

How successfully was this victimhood and aggression narrative imposed? Gagnon's study offers some insight. Despite all the media attention and political focus, in Croatia, only 15% of the population wanted full independence from Yugoslavia in 1990, while 64% opted for a confederal solution (Zakošek, cited in Gagnon, 2004). In the 1990 elections, HDZ won 41.8% of the votes cast – which, considering the turnout, was only about 45% of all eligible voters (2004, p. 140). In 1992, a poll showed that only 14.3% of citizens thought that exiled Serbs should remain in Serbia (rather than return to Croatia) (2004, p. 156) despite the fact that Serbs were by then publicly represented as collective enemy. The popularity of HDZ also did not rise steadily over time, even though its narrative firmly dominated the public space. These numbers provide no insight into what the citizens thought about the war, or why they voted the way they did. Moreover, there were other indicators – including the general silence over war crimes committed on Serb civilians – which indicate, if nothing else, that the strategy of demobilization had worked relatively successfully: even if citizens were not internalizing the narrative, very few were vocally opposing its version of events (and actions related to it). Yet these data indicate that there was a discrepancy between the omnipresence of the narrative – its constant repetition in the media, by political figures and through other channels, such as monuments and history lessons (see below) – and its actual impact. Not that no other narratives existed; they were just not articulated in the public space, and so the HDZ narrative became dominant.

There was, unsurprisingly, little room left in this narrative for two things. One was the stories of war crimes committed by Croat troops; the other, inclusivity that would require crossing over the “us-them” divide in some sense. At the same time, a strategy was quickly devised to respond to any kind of challenge or critique to this narrative: critics were dismissed as “Yugoslav”, thus anti-Croat and not to be trusted. To understand this, a brief look at how Communist history was treated is required.

The new regime in the early 90s quickly distanced itself from the Communist era. Settlements, streets, and squares were renamed; monuments were destroyed or neglected, as if to encourage active forgetting (A. Assmann, 2014)⁷⁸. History textbooks were revised (Najbar-Agičić, 2002; Pavlaković, 2008c), as was historiography more broadly (Kevo, 2013). Part of this process was aimed at “nationalizing” history (Najbar-Agičić & Agičić, 2006), and at better identifying the “enemy.” As mentioned above, political figures also followed suit, re-narrating the past in speech and writing. Yugoslavia was presented as a project of Greater-Serb hegemony; Croats who fought in the Partisans were discussed as if they were independent from the state that resulted from their efforts, while Tito was presented as the protector of Croatian interests in the SFRY. The Tuđman-coined terms “Serbo-Communism” and “Yugo-Communism” were derogatory summaries of these views (Đurašković, 2016a, p. 7), which were also meant to de-legitimize the Yugoslav regime’s successor party, the SDP. Handy and useful, the terms soon turned into catch-all phrases for anyone who opposed the HDZ-propelled narrative and their politics. Tuđman’s policy of dismissing Yugoslavia as a Serb conspiracy, together with his disqualification of political opponents as “Yugoslavs” led to all narratives but the dominant one being dismissed for being “not Croatian enough.” Meanwhile, HDZ’s self-praise for accomplishing the thousand-year old dream (*tisućljetni san*) of Croatian independence served to establish a connection between the past and present independence, enabling HDZ to capitalize on this historic victory.

3.3 After the war: Shaping political memory

As I demonstrated in the previous section, a particular kind of wartime narrative was created through national mobilization, media control and the imposition of national unity. This was not yet memory, but a construction of the present, and a configuration of the political space in accordance with certain ideas that were created and distributed from the top down. This section

⁷⁸ On streets and squares, see Crljenko, 2012; Marjanović, 2007; Pavlaković, 2014; Radović, 2013.

sketches out the process of evolution from a narrative of the present to a memory narrative, to show how the tenets of the dominant narrative were kept in the official discourse, forming political memory.⁷⁹

The immediate post-war period brought a proliferation of different stories articulated on the experience, aided in no small manner by the slow but steady changes in media landscape. However, I argue here, the narrative formed during the war that remained dominant, determining – and significantly limiting – the way that the war is spoken of and remembered in public.

3.3.1 Memory and (lack of) change

In what follows, I provide an overview of key elements and processes of political memory-making in Croatia since the mid-1990s. I focus on the key sources of creating and sustaining the narrative, such as explicit narrativization (e.g. political speeches); processes of history-teaching and writing; national symbols and commemoration; the role of key actors in the process of dealing with the past (in particular the ICTY and domestic courts where possible). The material is vast, and the amount of works written, policies, speeches, events and other materials produced, would require much more space than is granted here. The aim here is modest: rather than providing a complete picture of political memory, I want to show that the political memory narrative has very much kept the basic ideas of the narrative developed during

⁷⁹ I discuss the concept of political memory at length in Chapter II. Here, it suffices to remind the reader that Aleida Assmann's distinction between 'modes' of memory (A. Assmann, 2006, see also 2010) enables us to think of various memory 'layers' which can, for analytical purposes, be treated separately. Political memory is the top layer of a societal memory structure, in terms of its origins, top-down mode of production and operation, and the space it shapes, which Assmann identifies as mainly national memory (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 217). Political memory concerns primarily the operationalization of national remembrance. In the same vein, Müller distinguishes between "'collective' or 'national' memory on the one hand, and mass individual memory on the other... [t]he former establishes a social framework through which nationally conscious individuals can organise their history" (Müller, 2004, p. 3). Political memory is sometimes naively ascribed to non-democratic societies which tend to produce "official memories" (Jović, 2004); yet this kind of simplification appears naïve, as one can observe that all states engage in some form of top-down narration of the past – even if that specific narration is not presented as the only one possible.

the war period. I compile works across theoretical differences and methodological approaches, taking key points to establish an overview of the narrative's development over the years.

One field that I do not tackle extensively is policy making and its role in shaping political memory. I thus summarize it here briefly. There is little research into policy measures established to maintain the 'Homeland War' narrative, perhaps because the theoretical link between such measures and memory narrative is not easy to establish. Yet Dolenc's work on veterans' benefits (Dolenc, 2018) offers a rare insight into ties between memory and specific policies, showing the dynamic between veterans – as a politically relevant group organizing to claim their benefits in the early 90s – and the state. This dynamic resulted in frequent legislative changes and increases in veterans' rights, privileges and benefits. There was also a steady increase in the number of registered veterans (reaching almost 12% of the total population; Dolenc, 2018, p. 62; see also Nezirović, 2018). A side effect of the initial successful lobbying of veterans' organisations with the HDZ was a development of strong political ties between the two groups (Dolenc, 2018, p. 68). This tie is visible also in veterans' political alignment with the party (see Fisher, 2003), culminating in the coordinated performative action during 'Homeland War' memorial events, during which veterans are treated as "fathers of the state" (Dolenc, 2018, p. 69). In other words, the dynamic of lobbying and political support relies heavily on the popular understanding of veterans as heroes of the war (a part of the memory narrative).⁸⁰ The frequent upgrading of the legal framework regulating veterans' rights – and the debates around this process, in which the veterans are referred to as those who "created the state of Croatia" (Hina, 2017a) – reinforces the familiar narrative and the relevance of the group within society. This privileged position is visible once the processes of (re)regulation of veterans' rights – the frequent changes, (mostly) increasing benefits, a dedicated

⁸⁰ "The veterans' success in reaching their goals was achieved to a large extent due to the perceived heroism of the soldiers in liberating Croatian territory from Serbian control in 1995. Support for the veterans fits nicely into HDZ discourse depicting the nation's brave struggle for independence" (Fisher, 2003, p. 78).

implementation body (own ministry) – are compared to the regulation of status of other characters in the war narrative, e.g. victims of sexual violence during the war, a status that was not regulated until 2015 and is still seen as problematic,⁸¹ or citizens of Serb ethnicity in Croatia, including returnees in formerly occupied areas (see Djuric, 2010; Koska, 2004, 2009). Policy focus doesn't just mean regulating issues: it means selecting and articulating (or not) certain issues as important, putting them on the agenda and choosing the solution(s). It impacts memory narratives both by selecting which characters are important and deserving and by defining them in the legal and policy acts, providing re-affirmation.

3.3.2 The victory of the victim, repeated: History lessons, monuments, commemorations

Aleida Assmann notes that “[c]ollective national memory (...) is receptive to historical moments of triumph and defeat, provided they can be integrated into the semantics of a heroic or martyriological narrative. What cannot be integrated into such a narrative are moments of shame and guilt, which threaten and shatter the construction of a positive self-image” (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 218). This applies to the case of Croatian post-war memory. The historical moment of triumph – victory in the ‘Homeland War’ – is the cornerstone of national memory. Defeat is integrated into the narrative through victimization stories, such as that of Vukovar, becoming, in a plot twist, a victory narrative. At the same time, instances of shame and guilt – I refer here primarily to the war crimes committed by the Croatian army and police forces – have been largely left out of the memory narrative. And although the process of memory-making has also included some steps towards a more inclusive memory, in particular after the government change in 2000 – as will be shown below – this process is slow and reversible, rather than linear, and was often interrupted bottom-up. I discuss this below with regard to the

⁸¹ See, for example, “Documenta: Ministarstvo hrvatskih branitelja ne priznaje žrtve seksualnog nasilja u ratu,” 2017; “Rat oko silovanih žena se nastavlja: Oglasilo se Ministarstvo branitelja,” 2017; “Sve problematične točke Zakona o pravima žrtava seksualnog nasilja,” 2015.

common instruments of political memory-making: history education, monuments, national holidays and official (parliamentary) acts.

By the time the war had ended in 1995, new national symbols to support the political narrative were already set up (see above). Educational policies were designed to strengthen the hegemony of the ruling party, the HDZ, and affirm the importance of its nation-building process. This included rewriting history to distance the newly independent state from Yugoslavia. Unsurprisingly, the war was given a prominent place in this process: the ‘Homeland War’ became a part of history lessons in school handbooks already in 1992 (Koren, 2011). During the 1995-2000 period, educational policy shifted between confirming the same agenda and the requests for its revision (Koren & Baranović, 2009). Handbook approvals were still fully under the control of the Ministry of Education. Until 2000, only one school handbook for teaching history to 8th-graders existed, for example; it narrated the country’s history as a long continuation of striving for statehood, finally achieved through the war – summarizing the “ideology of Croatian statehood” (Najbar-Agičić & Agičić, 2006, p. 178).⁸² History lessons thus praised Tuđman and the HDZ for their role in achieving the statehood goal (Agičić, 2011, pp. 264–265). In contrast, Serbs were presented as responsible for the (contested) crimes committed in the country during WWII, depicting them as “eternal enemies” (ESI, 2015, p. 11) – thus giving the “us-them” division in the present a long history and implied causality. The political aim was to create “healthy patriotism” among the youth (Agneza Sabo, history book consultant, in ESI, 2015, p. 12).⁸³

The 2000 change of government brought some changes to how history was written for the youth. There was now a wider choice of handbooks to teach from, which opened up space

⁸² The system of multiple handbooks for history classes was introduced in the 1996/1997 schoolyear, starting with 7th grade of primary school (Koren & Baranović, 2009, p. 100). Yet the 20th century lessons – including the ‘Homeland War’ – were covered only in the 8th grade.

⁸³ This did not always include falsification of information: more subtle methods, such as pointing out certain information in suggestive contexts or connecting two unrelated information to create a sense of connection or causality (see Najbar-Agičić & Agičić, 2006, p. 173) were also used.

for different representations of recent history; active attempts were made by the newly-elected government to reduce the stifling pressure on authors when it came to presenting national history (Agičić, 2011; ESI, 2015).⁸⁴ The educational policy overall, however, changed only slightly during this period (2000-2003). Plans for a large-scale reform were subjected to a backlash from the opposition and its supporters, and eventually abandoned for moderate changes after the return of HDZ to power in 2004 (Koren & Baranović, 2009). Initially the curricula remained the same, leaving out disputed topics, e.g. any discussion of national minorities in the country, and in particular the Serb minority outside of the context of the war (Najbar-Agičić & Agičić, 2006, p. 186). Serb characters – including those from other historical periods – were still being depicted as “anti-heroes” (Najbar-Agičić & Agičić, 2006, p. 189). There was, however, some diversity in how the war was presented in handbooks during the 2000s. While they all told stories of more-or-less the same events, the language and framing differed significantly between them. E.g. while the rebellion of the local Serbs supported by JNA was described universally as “greater-Serbian aggression,” descriptions of local Serbs who took part in the conflict now varied from “rebel Serbs” to “Četnik troops,” providing very different connotations; assertions on what had caused certain events – e.g. the mass departures of Serb citizens following Oluja – varied, as did the lessons on Vukovar, which one handbook still described as “a three-month heroic epic.” Crimes committed by the Croatian army were still rarely mentioned (Barunčić & Križe, 2006).⁸⁵ At the same time, opening up to more pluralist discourses in the classroom still often resulted in public backlash (Agičić, 2011, pp. 361–362; ESI, 2015, pp. 15–20).⁸⁶ And while representations of both Yugoslavia and the war

⁸⁴ This did not go without resistance, including accusations that the new government is essentially attempting to destroy the newly-established Croatian state; see (Koren & Baranović, 2009, pp. 105–112)

⁸⁵ Strangely, despite having listed all these – rather different – examples of writing about the war, the authors of the study arrived to the conclusion that there has not been much difference between the books in representing the recent past, and that overall the representation is “fair” (Barunčić & Križe, 2006, p. 647).

⁸⁶ The conflict over the narrative of the war to be taught in schools came to the fore again during the 2005 controversy over the history-teaching supplement that was ordered by the (then) Ministry of Science and Education, to be used in Serb schools in former occupied areas after the lifting of the five-year moratorium on teaching contemporary history. The content of the supplement, which included lines about the killings of Serb

period did get progressively less in line with political memory as time progressed, this change was not linear. Thus, primary schoolbooks as late as 2007 – following a moderately successful attempt at educational reform and a new curriculum in 2006⁸⁷ – offered a narrative close to that of the 1990s, while others presented a more nuanced overview of the same period (Agičić, 2011).⁸⁸ The handbooks thus reflected a wider societal conflict: while some integrated the debates about topics such as war crimes and presented recent history as complex and multi-faceted, others reflected the pressure – most prominently from the many veterans’ associations – to maintain a positive image of the war (Koren & Baranović, 2009, pp. 122–130).⁸⁹

The war remained a tangible presence in the public space, due both to the slow process of rebuilding the damaged infrastructure and the erection of monuments as designated memory tools. Initial processes of monument-building during the war were spontaneous, with veterans and victims’ family members improvising monuments to mark their intimate places of loss (Križić Roban, 2010). While this practice continued – as exemplified in one of the largest public monuments, the “Wall of Pain” (*Zid boli*), 13600 bricks erected as a protest act in 1993 by family members of the missing and deceased – erecting official monuments became the most common form of political memory-making in the region (Dragičević Šešić, 2011). This was a practice visible on both the state and local/regional level. In 1994, even before the war ended, Tuđman commissioned the Homeland Altar (*Oltar domovine*) as part of the Medvedgrad

civilians and the destruction of property as well as about the official Croatian involvement in the war in Bosnia, caused an uproar in the Croatian public. Particularly interesting was the comment by the then-mayor of Osijek and prominent right-wing politician Anto Đapić that the supplement was “contrary to the Declaration on the Homeland War.” In May 2005, the Serb community agreed to use the existing textbooks. For the text and subsequent public debate in the media, see Dubljević, 2007.

⁸⁷ Koren and Baranović note that the new curriculum predominantly negatively affected history-teaching, as the topic of the war was „whitewashed of any events that could interfere with the official memory of the war“, including events surrounding the Oluja operation (Koren & Baranović, 2009, p. 128).

⁸⁸ Calls for history narratives that focus more on the tragedy of the war have also been prominent in a part of the academia focusing on the war, including historians; see e.g. Artuković, 2013.

⁸⁹ A 2017 controversy over retired generals educating history professors about the war through a program funded by the Ministry of Science and the Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency – a project that caused a stir among domestic historians – could be taken to show that the dialogue over what should be taught as the history of the war is still very much ongoing, with the state once again leaning more towards the narratives of the (literal) victors (Lilek, 2017; Lucić, 2017).

fortress in Zagreb. The monument, built to honor the war victims, included motives taken from the country's history, the symbol of the cross and the lyrics of the Croatian anthem, all carved in stone blocks forming the shape of the national coat of arms – referencing the continuity between the past and the present. Initially imagined as the central place of official commemorations, the monument is no longer used as a place of official piety and is in the process of rebuilding (Karačić, Banjeglav, & Govedarica, 2012, pp. 131–134). However, the idea of building an official place dedicated to honoring the homeland – and the “legitimate and legal struggle for survival” (Ivo Josipović, cited in Karačić et al., 2012, p. 134) – was not abandoned; it has been advocated by both the HDZ- and SDP-led governments since, thus far without success.⁹⁰

Tuđman – as the symbolic father of the nation – has been the subject of many monuments across a number of Croatian cities (Dragičević Šešić, 2011), the most recent one erected in Zagreb at the time of finishing this dissertation (end of 2018). Multiple monuments have also been made to commemorate various prominent military figures, and “an inflation” of monuments (including plaques) has been built to honor the country's veterans and victims (I. Jelača, 2014, p. 42). Research by UDIK documented 1212 war-related monuments in Croatia at the end of 2017, funded and built by state authorities, regional and local authorities or NGOs and private individuals/groups (Ćudić, 2017a). 76.24% of monuments were erected for soldiers, 3.14% to commemorate civilians, and the remainder a combination of the two (Ćudić, 2017b, pp. 475–476). By repeating the common war figures, terminology (veterans, ‘Homeland War’), characters (victims, heroes) and symbols (e.g. altar, cross), these monuments tend to strengthen the dominant narrative of the war, although they do not always explicitly endorse it.⁹¹ Križić Roban identified the cross as the most common symbol used in the ‘Homeland War’

⁹⁰ The monument, „a monument to the homeland“, is currently in the works, to be funded by the city of Zagreb (Polšak Palatinuš, 2018).

⁹¹ A separate problem is the quality of the monuments in question; yet this issue has also been raised only periodically (I. Jelača, 2014; Križić Roban, 2010).

monuments – symbolizing “suffering, loss and (expected) resurrection” (Križić Roban, 2010, p. 227). Victimhood is almost exclusively reserved for one ethnicity – Croat (Banjeglav, 2012). Several monuments also commemorate both victims of the WWII and those of the ‘Homeland War’, treating all losses as a sacrifice for the same cause (Karačić et al., 2012, p. 136) – again creating a direct tie between present, past and Croatian statehood. The Ministry of Croatian Veterans has, since 2008, held annual tenders to support the building of commemorative statues and plaques concerning the ‘Homeland War.’ These tenders are open to local and regional municipalities and NGOs; the proposed project need to “preserve the moral dignity of the Croatian people and all citizens of the Republic of Croatia who have taken part in the defense of the Republic of Croatia from the greater-Serbian aggression” (Ministarstvo hrvatskih branitelja, 2018). This helps promote a specific narrative of the war, even if it doesn’t automatically exclude different narratives.

For a long time, no government-sponsored monuments have, however, commemorated Serb victims, emphasizing the segment of forgetting in memory-production. Regarding places of national memory, the 1996 *Croatian Law on Marking Sites of Mass Graves of the “Homeland War” Victims* defined victims of the Homeland War as “Croatian war veterans and civilians who died in mass executions during Serbian and Montenegrin chetnik aggression and aggression of the Yugoslav army on the Republic of Croatia” (Hrvatski sabor, 1996b). In 2017, 94.47 of all documented monuments commemorated individuals of Croatian nationality, and only 1.24% (a total of 15 monuments) those of Serbian nationality in Croatia, all civilian victims (Ćudić, 2017b, pp. 475–476; Pavlaković, 2017a). There have since been attempts to partially rectify this omission. In October 2010, president Josipović opened the renewed, locally-funded monument to nine civilian Serb victims of Operation Storm, articulating on the occasion that they were innocent victims of a crime. Yet these individual pieces do not change the saturation of public space with commemorative works supportive of the dominant narrative. Moreover,

there is widespread resistance to commemorating citizens of Serb ethnicity (Banjeglav, 2013a, pp. 137–143), including blocking the erection of new monuments or vandalizing existing ones (Pavlaković, 2017a).

Commemorations were – and still are – another frequently used tool of memory-making. Official post-war commemorations were organized primarily to honor Croatian victimhood and celebrate victory. This was especially true of the two central events: commemoration of the fall of Vukovar and the celebration of the Oluja victory. In 1999, November 18 was declared by the Parliament as *Remembrance Day for the Victimhood of Vukovar in 1991 (Dan sjećanja na žrtvu Vukovara 1991. godine)*, to be celebrated with an annual official ceremony in the city (Hrvatski Sabor, 1999a). The mourning of Vukovar has for years been reinforcing the story of national victimhood (see Kardov, 2006; Žanić, Kufrin, & Živić, 2016) as well as – through focusing on the collectivity rather than individual suffering (Banjeglav, 2013a) – emphasizing the long historical path Croatia (as a whole, an unit) had had to undertake to reach independence, reaffirming the imaginary national unity. The annual “memory walk”, evoking the Christian “way of the cross,” reaffirms the piety and sacrifice of the “hero-city.” Yet these commemorations have also posed some challenges to the dominant narrative. Participation of anti-war civil society organizations from Serbia served as an attempt to shift the focus from collective to individual suffering (Banjeglav, 2013a). At the same time, veterans’ associations have in recent years openly clashed with the political leadership over the commemoration, with the 2013 protests – over legally required Cyrillic markings on official state institutions – as the culmination, resulting in two different processions.

The *Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day* (since 2008 also *Croatian Veterans’ Day*) is commemorated annually in Knin.⁹² During the 1990s, commemorative speeches by high officials on the occasion ignored the experiences of Serb civilians, framing the operation

⁹² Additional dates marking remembrance days related to the war in both Croatia and Bosnia have been added to the calendar since; see Koren, 2011, p. 142.

solely as the “rebirth of the Croatian nation” and a victorious event (Karačić et al., 2012, p. 145). This narrative evolved since the 2000 change of government, but only limitedly. During the SDP coalition government, high officials did not take part in the celebration, in fear of backlash due to the changed policy of cooperation with the ICTY (see below). Since 2004, their participation is common, and post-Oluja crimes tend to get a mention. This changed rhetoric on the aftermath of the operation has caused significant backlash, including alternative celebrations organized by the veterans’ associations since 2005. Yet the officials’ narrative still continues to stress the fully legal nature of the operation, individualizing the committed crimes and presenting them as unrelated to the operation itself (Karačić et al., 2012, p. 147). The alternative commemorations organized by war veterans (Pavlaković, 2009), on the other hand, tend to uncritically embrace the victorious side of the story, equating any criticism with treason.

Official actions to shape memory of the war in Croatia also included policy interventions aimed at defining and protecting the actors of the war narrative (e.g. awarding pensions to veterans; see previous section). Finally, the political memory narrative was given legal backing through documents devised by the country’s legislative body, including two parliamentary declarations: the *Declaration on the Homeland War* (Hrvatski sabor, 2000a) and the *Declaration on Operation Storm* in 2006 (Hrvatski sabor, 2006). As Koren (Koren, 2011, pp. 123–128) points out, the use of legal documents and parliamentary declarations to formulate history (and shape memory) is far from specific to post-war Croatia. Yet in Croatia, parliamentary acts have played a significant role in limiting the debate of the ‘Homeland War’ to the dominant narrative. The preamble of the 1990 Constitution had already listed the key stages in the development of the independent Croatia, supporting the political narrative at the time; the 2010 preamble amendments included the war as one of the key moments in the country’s history, confirming its prominent place in collective memory. Several parliamentary decisions and declarations went on to define the “values of the Homeland War,” affirming a

particular view of the past over others (Koren, 2011, p. 128). The narrative of the war as “just and legitimate, defensive and liberating, and not aggressive and conquering” was given legal backing in the Declaration on the Homeland War at the end of 2000 (Hrvatski sabor, 2000a). The Declaration, voted in amidst political conflicts over dealing with the war heritage (Koren, 2011, pp. 132–137), monopolized the “historical truth” about the war, defining the character of the war and assuming that the “basic values of the Homeland War are uniformly accepted among all Croatian people and all citizens of the Republic of Croatia,” effectively diverting attention from other issues – including crimes committed by Croatian soldiers as well as Croatia’s involvement with the war in Bosnia (Koren, 2011). The Declaration’s Article 6 did include the necessity to process all (individual and other) crimes committed “in aggression over the Republic of Croatia and the armed rebellion during the Homeland War.” Yet the framing implied this is valuable only if these activities honor a set of familiar narrative cues. The Declaration thus invited for legal action and scientific enquiry – as long as they fit neatly within the already established narrative. The Declaration on Operation Storm followed the same lead, defining the operation as “the decisive, glorious, victorious battle of the Homeland War that will become a part of the Croatian ‘useful past’ for future generations” (Hrvatski sabor, 2006, sec. 6). It referred to the character of the heroic soldier – naming some of the military members involved in the process – creating a full narrative of the operation (Koren, 2011). The Declaration received a mixed response amongst the opposition, with some finding it “counterproductive” (M. Šurina, 2005). Civil society anti-war activists protested against “the creation of a regulated relationship towards the events of the past” (Documenta, 2006). The last of the declarations trying to explicitly narrativize the war, it resonated little with the broader public, and it brought no real changes to the narrativization of the ‘Homeland War’.

3.3.3 ICTY and challenging the narrative of the war

The strongest challenge to the dominant narrative – and political memory – in Croatia has for years come from an institution external to the country, namely the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).⁹³ I base this claim on a particular understanding of transitional justice proposed by Rangelov (Rangelov, 2014) and brought to my attention by Sokolić (Sokolić, 2018), which emphasizes the discursive relevance of transitional justice institutions with regard to national – nationalist – narratives: their ability to start discussion over narratives of past events in the public sphere. In the context of post-war Croatia, the ICTY was the strongest institution of this kind. It participated in creating what Sokolić calls the “justice narrative” of the war: “the stories that transitional justice institutions in Croatia and in The Hague try to impart on the Croatian public” (Sokolić, 2018, pp. 53–54). An important part of the justice narrative is a version of what events took place during the war period – a version that sometimes clashes, and at other times aligns with the dominant narrative. It thus has both the potential to undermine and strengthen it, in unpredictable ways. In this section, I look at the impact of the Tribunal’s proceedings and verdicts on the political memory narrative.

Set up on the 25th of May 1993 through the UN Security Council's Resolution 827 with the primary aim of prosecuting perpetrators of crimes committed during the wars in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 onwards, the ICTY eventually indicted 161 individuals and sentenced 89 prior to its closure on the 31st of December 2017.⁹⁴ The Tribunal’s role was described in its founding resolution as prosecuting persons responsible for the grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other violations of international humanitarian law, but also of contributing to the end of crimes, as well as to restoration and maintenance of peace in the former Yugoslav

⁹³ The ICTY was established in 1993 by the UN, with the mandate to “prosecute and try individuals on four categories of offences: grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva conventions, violations of the laws or customs of war, genocide and crimes against humanity” (see ICTY, n.d.). On the formation of the court and its structure, see Allcock, 2014, pp. 353–367.

⁹⁴ The remaining proceedings continue to be conducted under its successor body, The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT).

territories (United Nation Security Council, 1993). The Tribunal's work, which also included legal proceedings for war crimes committed by Croatian nationals, inevitably overlapped with and occasionally challenged the existing narrative, which made it a high-profile actor in shaping war memory.

Even after its closure, it remains difficult to evaluate the work of the ICTY, and especially its impact on the countries of the former Yugoslavia. On the one hand, the Tribunal played an important role in prosecuting crimes committed in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Gaynor, 2012; Hoffman, 2016; McDonald, 2004; Peskin & Boduszynski, 2003), including engaging the domestic courts in war crimes trials by forwarding some of its cases. The Tribunal's impact on fostering peace was also generally estimated as positive, more likely to keep peace than national judiciaries (Bass, in Pavlaković, 2008a, p. 451). On the other hand, the answer to the question of how much the ICTY has contributed to the memory discourse – political or cultural – remains inconclusive. The working of the ICTY has not resulted in significant altering of the official narrative. Political actors, both governing and oppositional, often (and sometimes deliberately) rejected to cooperate with the ICTY and ignored the narratives it produced. Often (Subotić, 2007; Peskin, 2008) the government acted strategically in its relationship with the Tribunal – adjusting the level of cooperation to the chances of achieving other interests through it – and occasionally both sides were involved in a process of negotiations.⁹⁵ This was sometimes interpreted as an unnecessary politicization of the Tribunal, and thus evidence of it being “anti-Croat” or biased towards different countries. The media frequently twisted or ignored the ICTY verdicts: the dominant narrative served as a template

⁹⁵ This is particularly visible in the process of Croatia's EU and NATO accession. During Tuđman's presidency, the country's relationship with the Tribunal added to its relative international isolation. During the 2000s, cooperation with the Tribunal became one of the conditions for joining the EU: the case of the fugitive Gotovina in particular had taken centre-stage, compromising on other steps the then HDZ-led government took to prove itself as an accession candidate. EU accession talks scheduled for March 2005 were officially postponed, while the Tribunal's prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, explicitly invited Croatia to locate and deliver the general. When the talks were eventually opened following a positive assessment six months later, it soon became clear that the reason was the government's cooperation over Gotovina – who was arrested and brought to the Tribunal on 7th of December that same year (see Pavlaković, 2008a, 2010a; Ramet & Soberg, 2008).

shaping new stories, with only those elements of indictments, processes and verdicts selected which could be integrated into a pre-set narrativization of the war (see Ristić, 2014). Finally, the public often rebelled against the Tribunal's decisions, which meant that the challenges the court's work presented to circulating memory narratives were integrated neither bottom-up nor top-down – or were integrated only when they already fitted the existing stories. I elaborate briefly on these points below.

The Croatian parliament initially welcomed the establishment of the Tribunal and adopted a *Constitutional Law on Cooperation of the Republic of Croatia with the ICTY* in 1996 (Hrvatski sabor, 1996a) to facilitate cooperation. Yet under the rule of the then-HDZ government, there was the expectation that Croatian citizens would not be prosecuted (see Pavlaković, 2008a note 23), but that the ICTY would confirm Croatian victimhood (Peskin, 2008, pp. 95–97; Ristić, 2014, p. 17). As it became obvious that this was not to be the case, the official stance towards the ICTY changed. The (unrealistic) expectation of a “friendly” tribunal was reinstated through a parliamentary *Resolution* three years later, in 1999, following the first indictments for Croatian nationals. The Resolution expressed disappointment with “unfulfilled expectations” regarding the processing of cases of “war and other heavy crimes committed against the Croatian people and other non-Serb population during the aggression of Serbia and Montenegro on Croatia, as well as during the armed rebellion in Croatia” (Hrvatski Sabor, 1999b). The document also rejected the “politicization” of the ICTY and “inappropriate public statements” made by its representatives regarding both operations Oluja and Bljesak. These operations were deemed to be outside of the Tribunal's jurisdiction, thus bringing its work into question (Lamont, 2013, p. 75). Familiar terms – aggression, rebellion (to avoid potential mention of a civil war), ethnic, collectivist determination of perpetrators – reappeared. The ruling party that had constructed the narrative of the sanctity of the war now needed to protect it. Criticism of the war was treated as “treason” (Pavlaković, 2008a, p. 451). Under these

conditions, cooperation with the court was hard to conceive. And while the country's leadership did send a number of generals to the Hague following indictments (related mostly to Croat activity during the war in Bosnia), the strategy was to claim that they had decided to go in their own will, thus avoiding the state's complicity and creating no precedents for future actions (Subotić, 2007, p. 86; see also Lamont, 2010; Peskin & Boduszynski, 2003). ICTY investigations were perceived as a threat to the legitimacy of the state (Lamont, 2010, p. 35).

As a result of its negative domestic representation, the ICTY became perceived by many as part of an "international anti-Croat conspiracy" (Pavlaković, 2008a, p. 448), implying that it misrepresented the war, and that it treated its Croat indictees more harshly than those of other ethnicities. The latter is empirically incorrect: out of 161 indictees, 29 were Croats; 18 out of the 89 convicted were of Croatian nationality. This attitude towards the court and its actions reflected the existing dominant narrative. It was also used to integrate the challenging facts established by the Tribunal into that narrative. For example, what was often ignored was the Tribunal's effective individualization of guilt: both political figures and media outlets tended to interpret individual indictments and verdicts as referring to the collective (usually the nation). This was to an extent a result of the way the dominant narrative was set up, using individuals as proxies for the nation and uninterested in individual stories if they could not be used as to extrapolate on the collective level. Meanwhile, domestic prosecution of war crimes was not going to make up for the lack of international cooperation.⁹⁶ Two domestic amnesty laws,⁹⁷

⁹⁶ In terms of trialing war crimes domestically, the situation was bad during the 1990s, but has been improving since, albeit at a slow pace. War crimes trials have been ongoing since 1992. Yet issues such as a generally inefficient and underqualified judiciary, in-absentia trials, witness intimidation, unprofessional behavior of court officials and a strong ethnic bias have tainted the processes from the start, and the trend has been continuous since (Dubljević, 2014; Subotić, 2007; Zoglin, 2005), while improving somewhat after the 2000 change in government (Banjeglav, 2013b, pp. 39–42; Vukušić, 2014).

⁹⁷ Amnesty Act from 1992 (Zakon o oprostima od krivičnog progona i postupka za krivična djela počinjena u oružanim sukobima i u ratu protiv Republike Hrvatske; NN58/92); General Amnesty Act from 1996 (Zakon o općem oprostima, NN80/96; names of acts translated in accordance with the working translations of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia; available at: http://www.vsrh.hr/CustomPages/Static/HRV/Files/Legislation__General-Amnesty-Act_1996.pdf). See Kurtović, 2003. The policy changed in 2003, with the provisions of the newly voted-in Act (Zakon o pomilovanju), finally reaching its systematization under president Josipović (K. Petković, 2013, pp. 94–96).

initially passed to serve as a guarantee against arbitrary prosecutions of rebel Serbs in Croatia, were frequently used to clear members of Croatian paramilitaries of crimes committed on Serb victims (Đurašković, 2016b, p. 157). This practice would continue throughout the 1990s (see K. Petković, 2013, Chapter 4) – until the change of government in 2000 (*Praćenje suđenja za ratne zločine: Izvještaj za 2005. godinu*, 2005).

The *Declaration on the Homeland War*, voted in under the rule of the new, left-coalition government that came to power in 2000, led by the prime minister Ivica Račan,⁹⁸ reaffirmed the dominant narrative. Overall, the new government's contribution to the change of political narrative was often contradictory. On the one hand, there was a clear intention to both change the dominant narrative and affirm cooperation with the Tribunal (Lamont, 2010, p. 38)⁹⁹, visible also in the new *Declaration on Cooperation with the ICTY* (Hrvatski sabor, 2000b). The Declaration recognized the need to process all crimes, as refusal to do so and cooperate with the ICTY would damage the credibility of the domestic justice system and put the country into a position of international isolation; it also acknowledged the Tribunal's jurisdiction on the matter. The new government insisted on prosecuting domestic crimes, thus actively intervening into the earlier interpretations of the war as a defensive and blameless event. However, the perceived necessity to please the strong veterans' associations often ended in unproductive (and ultimately unsuccessful) balancing acts, as discussed below. The veterans' groups co-opted the dominant narrative and were ready to defend it very vocally – as evidenced from the mass protests organized over the alleged indictment for general Mirko Norac.¹⁰⁰ The protest shook

⁹⁸ The coalition consisted out of six parties, which held 95 parliamentary seats to HDZ's 46: the Social- Democratic party of Croatia (SDP), Croatian Social-Liberal Party (HSLS), Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), Croatian People's Party (HNS), Liberal Party (LS) and Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS; on the elections, see Zakošek, 2001). IDS withdrew in 2001, while still continuing to support the coalition in Parliament, and HSLS withdrew in July 2002 over ICTY disagreements, reducing the coalition to four members, which also constituted the second Račan cabinet (Jović, 2006, in particular p. 13 note 21).

⁹⁹ On the discursive positioning of the new government with regard to both the previous one and Europe, see Zambelli, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Norac was to be indicted for his involvement with the September 1993 civilian murders. As the news broke out, a call for protests was issued by the organization Central Headquarters for the Defense of the Dignity of the Homeland War (*Središnji stožer za zaštitu digniteta Domovinskog rata*). This resulted in mass demonstrations in

the governing coalition, with the head of the coalition partner of Račan's SDP, Dražen Budiša of HSLs, eventually resigning over new indictments (Ademi and Gotovina). It also showed that the political memory narrative actively shaped the cultural memory in a schematic fashion – top-down discourse became performed also horizontally.

Following these events, the government became more cautious in its actions. In response to an announced indictment of Janko Bobetko (ICTY, 2002), who was the former military Chief of the General Staff, Račan described the indictment as "...legally and politically unacceptable to the Republic of Croatia..." (cited in Lamont, 2010), playing into the official narrative.¹⁰¹ Sabor voted unanimously against the indictment. This course of events also increased the relevance of another character, general Ante Gotovina – an Oluja general-turned-fugitive.¹⁰² Račan's ambiguous relationship with the ICTY was demonstrated in an open letter to the Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, expressing his discontent over the "criminalisation and indirect denial of the Storm operation's legitimacy" (Peskin & Boduszynski, 2003, p. 1130) in Gotovina's indictment.

In the 2003 elections, HDZ capitalized – among other things – on the anti-Hague rhetoric (Jović, 2009). The new coalition government led by Ivo Sanader¹⁰³ took an

the city of Split, calling for government resignation and "protection of national interest" (Pavlaković, 2008a; Peskin & Boduszynski, 2003; Slobodna Dalmacija, 2000). The bottom-up defense of the dominant narrative was summed-up by the representative of the Headquarters, Mirko Čondić. He held a passionate speech in which he said: "Mesić and Račan seem to want Croatia to kneel down in front of the Serbs and beg for forgiveness. By putting Norac on trial they want to put the whole Croatian army and nation on trial...For the trial of Norac is the trial of Croatian freedom, and the freedom of Norac is the freedom of the Croatian people. As long as we the creators of the Croatian state are alive there will be no trial against Norac." (Slobodna Dalmacija, cited in Subotić, 2007, p. 92)

¹⁰¹ Jović (Jović, 2006, p. 18) notes that "Račan and the HSS leader Zlatko Tomčić praised Bobetko for his role in the war, and had promised that he would not be extradited."

¹⁰² Up until his indictment, Gotovina was a relatively unknown figure, best known for having been one of the military officials sent into retirement by the newly elected president Mesić in 2000 for an open letter calling out against the "criminalization of the Homeland War" (Jović, 2006; Slobodna Dalmacija, 2000). Yet as he became a fugitive from the court, his name became synonymous with the sanctity of the war narrative.

¹⁰³ HDZ's coalition partners were HSLs, the Democratic Center (*Demokratski centar*, DC, a party founded by former HDZ members) and the Croatian Pensioners' Party (*Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika*, HSU). Following the elections in 2007, upon winning 66 seats, HDZ entered coalition with HSLs and the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS). On the changes within HDZ towards becoming a more moderate party, see Boduszynski, 2010.

unexpectedly cooperative stance towards the ICTY, both in terms of sending indicted military officials to the Hague and administering the cooperation with the court (Lamont, 2009, 2010). This was done largely for reasons related to foreign policy, specifically EU accession after years of low European popularity under Tuđman and a change of narrative under Račan (Jović, 2006). The new strategy was described by Sanader as having four main aims: protecting the truth of the war, assisting the accused, enabling them to defend themselves while on bail, and moving the trials from the ICTY to Croatian courts” (in Pavlaković, 2008a, p. 461) . It thus enabled the government to comply with ICTY requests while sticking to the familiar war narrative.

Upon Gotovina’s arrest on December 7, 2005, the government responded by providing legal aid, and the Croatian parliament by offering another declaration, this time on Oluja. The declaration was worded in response to the Gotovina indictment, which classified the operation as a “joint criminal enterprise.” This was interpreted as implying that the war had been an illegal activity – a stance incoherent with the dominant narrative. Right-wing political parties and veterans’ associations immediately organized in protest. Gotovina, meanwhile, became the nation’s hero, martyr and *hajduk*, framed as incapable of committing a crime (Pavlaković, 2010a, p. 1736) – and even as the face of a just war.

Following a long trial, on the 15th of April 2011 Gotovina was found guilty on charges of crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war committed by the Croatian forces during the Oluja operation. The announcement caused only a few minor public protests, and no declarations. On 16th of November 2012, the Appeals Chamber of the ICTY overturned the verdict, finding that the prosecution’s case was built on an unsustainable concept of “impact analysis,” which deemed shelling of four cities in the Krajina unlawful as they were outside of the 200-meter margin of error, the so-called “200 Metre Standard – a number which the Appeals Chamber found to be provisional. More importantly, the Chamber concluded that, since there was no evidence that the shelling was unlawful, there was no proof that the Joint

Criminal Enterprise (JCE) to expel Serbs from the area – the key and most contested legal concept of the indictment – existed. The Tribunal acquitted both Gotovina and another general trialed in the same process, Mladen Markač, ordering their immediate release. This news was received with glee in Croatia – as it was interpreted to reinforce the dominant memory narrative. The discussion turned to the injustice of the trial itself, as Gotovina was clearly innocent to begin with (Vukušić, 2014). His acquittal was read to mean more than his innocence; it meant no crimes could have taken place at all. The Chamber’s stance on the JCE, meanwhile, was seen to confirm that the war was indeed just defensive and no crimes were committed.

Above I have tried to sketch the key points in the process of negotiation of political memory of the war between two actors: the Croatian governments and the ICTY. I identify three main reasons why the Tribunal’s impact on memory has been so limited: the role that the established dominant narrative – as a narrative template – had taken in shaping memory of the war; the content of the narratives resulting of the court proceedings (which did not fit into the pre-existing, template-shaped narrative); and the way these narratives were communicated.

The template produced a core narrative that was seen as useful in the electoral processes, both for HDZ (see Lamont, 2013) and – to a lesser extent – SDP. Račan’s government, in an attempt to keep in power, relaxed its initial insistence on cooperating with the Tribunal and prosecuting all crimes. HDZ-led governments, which relied on veteran voters but also strived for EU accession, also offered mixed messages at best – including statements such as the one by the then-prime minister that “[our history] will not be written by anyone but us” (Sanader, cited in jutarnji.hr, 2007). For the most part, they supported the dominant narrative. The frequent public backlashes – including the letter written by the army generals and the public protests for Norac, Bobetko and Gotovina (among others) – kept reaffirming the same narrative (often in an even more literal version), taking out the motivation for institutional political actors to question it from the top down. With the support from several societal groups – most notably

war veterans – strongly on the side of protecting the “sanctity” of the war, challenging it was not the most opportunistic move for anyone in power or interested in seizing it. Instead, the opposite route was taken, legitimizing the narrative through a stream of parliamentary declarations and other documents. However, while public support (measured through surveys) was very high for the indicted generals at certain points, this was far from a key issue for all citizens at all times (Pavlaković, 2008a), as is it often presented in retrospect.

Most of the Tribunal’s verdicts offered interpretations of the war that could not be easily integrated into the dominant narrative. The emphasis on individualizing guilt was consistently read as assigning collective blame. But even if this had not been the case, the insistence on the fully defensive, blameless victory was in contradiction with recognizing that crimes have in fact been committed.

Finally, the mediation of communication between the Tribunal and the public did not help with renegotiating the narrative. For the most part, the dissemination of information from the ICTY to the Croatian public was poor (Parker, 2009, p. 87). The Tribunal had no outreach office or Croatian-written press releases until 2000 (Lamont, 2010, p. 43), meaning that direct information was not widely available for most of the general public. The legal language of indictments and verdicts is not easily accessible, and the amount of court-produced documentation is vast and often technical. It was the media that processed and mediated the Tribunal-related information for most of the public. And how it did it significantly shaped the information presented. Ristić (Ristić, 2014) shows how the “winners’ memory” in Croatia meant “ethnicization of trials, subjecting them to the main myths of the nationalist narrative” (2014, p. 96). Vast discrepancy existed between the Tribunal’s attempts to establish guilt or innocence, the victims’ individualized perspectives, and the tendency to filter the ICTY-provided information through a pre-established narrative of victimhood and Serbian guilt, dismissing elements that do not fit. The victims’ complex individual narratives – as in the case

of Ovčara – were reduced to a narrative of collective Croatian suffering and Serb aggression, ignoring both the quest for individual responsibility driving the legal process and the testimonies that defied the stereotypical image of all Serbs as guilty or aggressors. The Milošević trial allowed the media to focus primarily on the “joint enterprise” part of the indictment – evidence of collective Serb guilt – as if the guilt has already been established and was awaiting confirmation by the Tribunal. Milošević’s untimely death before the end of the extremely long trial helped in maintaining such interpretation (Ristić, 2014). In reporting, most media – by now formally independent from political pressure – perpetuated biases and collectivist readings of the verdicts,¹⁰⁴ in line with a familiar template in which Croatia was attacked, its victims suffered, and its soldiers fought bravely and won (Vukušić, 2014, p. 161).

Examples given in this section are sketches rather than a full picture of narrative development. They demonstrate how the political memory narrative resisted intervention from the ICTY. This narrative, as already mentioned, was not only propelled top-down. It was also taken up by vocal societal groups as the sole truth about the war – including in those places where war was not just a narrative, but a lived experience (see Banjeglav, 2016 for an account of the ICTY impact in Vukovar; see also Benčić, 2015; Čorkalo et al., 2004; Sokolić, 2018). Most strikingly, the Tribunal remains dismissed by both Croats and Serbs as “unfair” and incapable of delivering justice due to insufficient punishments, or “outrageous” for putting on trial people who were “just defending themselves” (Banjeglav, 2016, p. 90).

The latter comment in particular reflects how resilient the idea of a defensive war that thus cannot incorporate war crimes is – indicating the deep rootedness of the official narrative also bottom-up, among citizens. The phenomenon of narratives influencing personal stories is not specific to Croatia. Personal memories are notoriously unreliable, and individual witnesses to events “forget, or reconstruct, their narratives as a kind of collage, or merge what they saw

¹⁰⁴ For a focused analysis on reporting on the Gotovina verdict, see Jakovčić & Kunac, 2011.

with what they read” (Winter, 2010, p. 314). Yet the strong impact of the schematic template shaping the memory – political, but also generational and cultural, is still remarkable.

3.3.4 Oppositional voices

All this does not mean that there are no other narratives of the war in circulation. The specificity of the ‘Homeland War’ as opposed to most key themes in national memory is its vicinity: it is a living personal experience of many of today’s citizens. These stories – personal memories – have often remained private. Yet many have also been collected and offered for consideration, recorded, spoken of in public arenas. Many personal narratives have been shared through court testimonies, both within the ICTY processes and during domestic trials. The trials were often sources of questioning the dominant narrative, confronting it with necessary expansions in form of war crimes. In recent years, there have been several attempts to collect, through instances of investigative journalism or NGO work (see also below), memories of individual Serb victims and their families (Matejčić, 2012), using them to question the credibility of the “us-them” divide along ethnic lines. Publications collecting individual experiences of Croat participants in the war have been on the rise (Dubljević, 2010; Kesić, n.d.), adding to an expanding collection of political and military, as well as personal narrative and diary-form books, autobiographies and experience-inspired fiction concerning the war (see Cvitan, 2002). These books often focus on specific social groups, such as women (Stanić & Mravak, 1998; Vušković & Trifunović, 2007), shifting the perspective slightly from the male-dominated heroic narrative.

Many media outlets and political office holders still continue to deny or relativize crimes, refusing to accept the verdicts of the Tribunal (Documenta, 2016). Media representations have evolved in some cases – e.g. with regard to representing former soldiers, who as veterans are often shown in a complex, often negative way (Car, 2008, 2009). But this change does not seem to significantly affect collective memory on either political or cultural

level. Even when problematic examples become instances of public negotiation, the debates are quickly suppressed and forgotten.¹⁰⁵

The most consistent questioning of the dominant narrative in Croatia (as well as in the region) has come from the NGO sector. During the war, individuals and groups gathered in the *ad-hoc* Anti-War Campaign (AWC) coalition, with the aim of ending the conflict and promoting non-violence, with a strong emphasis on human rights protection, e.g. for refugees (see Bilić, 2013; Janković & Mokrović, 2011; Komnenović, 2014). The coalition did not manage to achieve its aim, but it served as a base for many NGOs in the future. Interestingly, the calls for war crimes prosecution during and after the war were limited and often overheard, and the initiative for war crimes trials came from outside – the UN – rather than from domestic organizations (Peskin & Boduszynski, 2003, p. 1123). Post-war, civil society organizations shifted their focus primarily on moving the war discourse away from the level of officials and perpetrators to the victims and their needs, with an emphasis of establishing facts and disseminating information, pertaining to building a sustainable, durable peace in the region. NGOs such as Documenta and Centar za mir, nenasilje i ljudska prava ran projects on monitoring and evaluating (domestic and ICTY) court processes, documenting human losses, lobbying for the rights of civilian war victims (regardless of nationality) and documenting individual experiences. All these activities, while frequently negatively framed in the media (Lamont, 2010, p. 46), consistently attempt to change the narrative focus, re-narrating the war

¹⁰⁵ Jović (Jović, 2009, p. 7) points to two such illustrative moments which “undermined to a degree the myth of the ‘Homeland War’ among the public, enabling a more critical reflection on the recent past.” One is the case of the wartime general Ivan Korade, who murdered four civilians and shot himself in 2008. Only after the incident did information about the crimes he committed earlier become public. The other is the case of Vladimir Zagorec, a general who in 2007 fled embezzlement charges (of money gathered by diaspora during the war for defense purposes) by fleeing to Austria. He was then revealed to have had connections to the Croatian criminal underground. Car (Car, 2008, 2009) shows how the glorified image of the heroic soldier did eventually lose its charm to an extent, deviating into different representations, including negative ones such as *tricksters* (in line with Jović’s moments listed above) and *enemies*/threats to society they are having a hard time integrating into after the war, a fact that, does re-question the value and purpose of the war itself. Yet this kind of imagery, while by now widely present in various media and culture works, is vocally rejected by veterans’ associations as an insult to the truth of the war.

as a plurality of experiences which cannot be summarized under one victorious narrative. At the same time, as discussed above, lot of civil society has consistently been actively hostile towards ICTY investigations, and not supportive of narrative change – in particular the well-funded veterans' associations (Lamont, 2010, p. 45). The initiative for a regional reconciliation commission, RECOM¹⁰⁶ (Irvine & McMahon, 2013; Kurze, 2012; Kurze & Vukušić, 2013) gained little support in Croatia, even compared to other states in the region¹⁰⁷ – although it has been supported by some prominent political figures, including former president Josipović. Battles for a narrative change with regard to the war from the NGO sector often ended up framed in familiar terms, as “anti-Croat” or “Yugoslav”, lessening the impact of those attempts.

Finally, despite the proliferation of narratives available and some changes in the media landscape over time, rare studies into personal memories of the war reaffirm both the existence of multiplicity of war narratives and a strong relevance of the schematic template that shapes them (Banjeglav, 2013b; Benčić, 2015; Sokolić, 2018).

In conclusion, the memory of the ‘Homeland War’ is among the central shared memories of Croatian citizens; some have even claimed its primacy, noting that it takes “the most prominent place in the Croatian historical memory” (Benčić, 2015, p. 25). At the same time, there is also a collective desire to forget and move from the past to the present. As Subotić noted in 2007, “[i]n many ways, Croatia is going through a conflict between war veterans who do not want to forget about the war and the rest of society that does” (Subotić, 2007, p. 112). Both verdicts are still true. What is certain is that the war is still omnipresent in society, so much so that even in 2012 there was “hardly a day that the topic of war is not present in Croatian printed and

¹⁰⁶ Regionalna komisija za utvrđivanje činjenica o ratnim zločinima i drugim teškim povredama ljudskih prava počinjenim na teritoriju nekadašnje SFRJ/The Regional Commission for Establishing the Facts about War Crimes and Other Gross Violations of Human Rights Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia. For details see recom.link and (RECOM, 2014)

¹⁰⁷ Out of the 550 000 signatures collected among citizens to support the initiative in 2011, only about 20 000 came from Croatia (referenced in Milekić, 2014).

electronic media” (Jović, 2012, p. 53). What this dissertation posits is that, when it comes to memory of the war, one particular narrative – that which began as the official war story, became political memory and yielded a schematic template to shape other formats of memory as well – radically dominates all others. In this chapter, I tried to elaborate how this narrative came to be, and how it changed – or didn’t – over time and why. In the following three chapters, I analyze the filmic production for the films’ dialogical relationship with this dominant narrative.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: FILMS DEALING WITH THE PAST

This chapter presents the results of analysis of the first group of films that arose from the thematic coding process, and were then analyzed for their dialogical relationship with the dominant narrative. It is the result of trying to understand what it is that these films *do* – or rather offer to do – to the way war is remembered, as well as what are the *strategies* – particular kinds of dialogical responses – through which they do it. I label these films as *dealing with the past* for their active attempts to intervene with the narrative of the ‘Homeland War.’ This does not imply that they take a progressive or critical stance towards the war; nor does it mean that these films re-narrate the war entirely. Rather, coming from and responding to a context deeply influenced by the dominant narrative, yet without a ready-made counter-narrative,¹⁰⁸ these films offer interventions into the dominant narrative in form of re-defined characters, re-evaluated actions and expanded stories. They also frequently emphasize the instability of narrating the war by drawing attention to the constructed nature not just of the ‘Homeland War’ narrative but any narrative – including their own. This dispels the idea of the war as a natural point of progress in the country’s history, a culmination of Croatia’s long collective movement from oppression to national liberty and statehood.

As I show below, the ways these films process and contribute to memory discourse differ vastly. What characterizes them all, however, is their dialogical relationship with the dominant narrative that holds a degree of directness and openness: these are films that respond to the dominant narrative directly, rather than trying to bypass it (see next chapter) or push it to

¹⁰⁸ The absence of a fully articulated counter-narrative means that even those who object to it end up supporting some of its elements, while critically revisiting others. I agree on this with Pavlaković, who points out that certain tenets of the dominant narrative – for example the idea of the war as international aggression rather than a civil war – are consistently defended by opposing voices (Pavlaković, 2014b, p. 23), despite the fact that the war can be argued to have been a civil war at least of a part of its duration. The widespread use of the term ‘Homeland War’, which is heavily related to one interpretation of that conflict, is an alternative example. Where Pavlaković and I disagree is whether the dominant narrative is indeed a myth or not: while the dominant stance in literature is that it can and should be referred to as such, I argue here that the mythical status of the narrative is in fact questionable. See Chapter II, footnote 20.

the background (see Chapter VI). This chapter categorizes the strategies the films take and elaborates the outcomes of those strategies in terms of collective memory. It looks at the stories the films tell; the difference between stories and filmic plots; and the characters, their characteristics, actions and developments in relation to those of the dominant narrative. It also looks at narrative ownership in those films. Four subgroups of films are identified by their differing strategies: (1) films that lead a critical dialogue with the dominant narrative of the past, proclaiming it faulty due to omissions/problems of perspective; (2) films that question the singularity of that narrative through reminding the viewer of the multiplicity of voices and perspectives not included; (3) films that reject the narrative by framing the war as a yet untold trauma-story, and (4) films that embrace the dominant narrative, albeit with minor adjustments. A detailed analysis of these films is laid out on the following pages.

The dynamism of the dialogue between films and the dominant memory narrative is here presented as exerting a two-way, push-and-pull dynamic, which also translates into how this dissertation approaches films in dialogue with the past. On the one hand, dialogue is always a dynamic, unpredictable exercise, dependent on what preceded it as well as what is thought to follow. At the same time, I argued in Chapter III that, while there have been incremental changes to it over time, the core of the dominant memory narrative has changed little despite its ever-changing context. The question then arises: is the film-narrative dialogue dynamic, and should thus be approached diachronically; or should it be examined with regard to the resilient core of the narrative, not paying much attention to the passing of time? In this chapter, I opt for a middle-ground approach. Analysing the strategies films take in responding to (elements of) the dominant narrative means opting for a static approach, which groups films together across time-periods. This glosses over the evolution of both the ways war was talked about and the film trends that might have affected their dialogical responses (including trends and changes worldwide). It also means that the primary organizational principle on the following pages will

be the films' belonging to a particular strategy-category, rather than chronology: certain films from end of the decade are thus discussed prior to those made in the early 2000s. Yet within each strategy-subgroup, chronology is preserved to capture some of the changes in the wider environment and their impact on the films. While multiple stories of the war have been articulated and shared in public space (from various participants, affected groups, ICTY etc.), the memory has remained largely unchanged. The films' communication with these alternative narrative sources (e.g. asking the viewer to draw on "common knowledge" of war crimes trials to fill in the missing narrative elements; see discussions below) shows, however, the dynamics that were present, and the need to keep them in mind to be able to comprehend the dialogical relation between works of cinema and representations of recent history.

4.1 Strategies of dialogue

4.1.1 Critical dialogue with the past

The first subgroup of films in this section relies on no particular strategy other than the dialogicality itself: these films engage in an act of communication and response to the dominant narrative through story, structure and characters. If the dominant narrative is marked by its illusion of linear progression from oppression to statehood that appears natural (disguising the narrative's constructed nature and political purposefulness), clear delineation between positive and negative characters ("our" characters, among them soldiers) and the culmination of the story in creating the state that the war produced, what would a dissenting response be? Tulviste and Wertsch (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994) show how, unlike the official narrative, which is structured and polished, the unofficial ones usually do not have the coherence of a full story, and instead respond to the official discourse with dissenting story fragments rather than one full narrative (see Chapter II). The same idea is useful to consider when observing hidden dialogicality here: one should expect miniature subversions and negations rather than a completely new narrative that re-tells everything that was told before in a different manner.

The three films discussed in this subsection enter into dialogue with the dominant narrative and end up rejecting it. *Ničiji sin* (*No One's Son*, 2008) suggest a kind of fraudulence within the narrative: the narrative as is cannot stand because it misleads the audience into thinking that the war was necessary, a natural consequence of the struggle for independence that was intended to benefit the whole of the (imaginary) national collective body. By depicting one personal story of wartime sacrifice as a lie based on deeply embedded interests and fraudulent identities, the film offers a reinterpretation of the war narrative in the same vein, revealing how the tales of a thousand-year old dream of Croatian statehood – propelled by the political leadership of the 1990s – in fact covered up the fact that the conflict itself was neither necessary for that statehood or in any way unavoidable. As I discuss in Chapter III, the latter idea is familiar from political science literature, where the idea of elites pushing for war out of fear for their own power is not novel (see in particular Gagnon, 2004; Jović, 2017). The question “Is this what we fought for?” is also a common call in the more critical parts of post-war Croatian society. It warrants saying, however, that it implies – unlike Gagnon’s or Jović’s accounts – a positive evaluation of the war (which is seen as heroic), contrasted to the negative emotions related to a populist¹⁰⁹ evaluation of post-war reality in which “some” (the elites) have unlawfully benefitted over “others.”¹¹⁰ Yet in cinema, while the idea that the war was fraudulently presented as it happened is, while sometimes hinted at (see also Chapter VI), rarely explicated as a central concern. In *Ničiji sin*, the critique offered draws partially on both these ideas: the motives for the war were, the film posits, essentially misconstrued, and it was foolish

¹⁰⁹ By populism, I assume the definition employed by Mudde: “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people“ (Mudde, 2004, p. 562). I am grateful to Levi Littvay for bringing this definition to my attention.

¹¹⁰ The story of the privatization process in Croatia does justify such a bleak view to an extent, although a proper evaluation and dealing with its consequences is yet to happen. On the process of privatization and some evaluations, see e.g. Gregurek, 2001; Hiller & Puseelj Drezga, 1994.

to sacrifice for them. The idea of a united, brotherly fight for a new community for all was a lie to begin with; and this lie came from one's own metaphorical family, the nation.

The two other films, *Crnci* (*Blacks*, 2009) and *Korak po korak* (*Step by Step*, 2011), reject the dominant narrative by challenging its claim to a truthful representation of events, showing how the narrative excludes a large part of what constituted the war experience (war crimes in *Crnci*; the ordinary, non-heroic quality to the war in *Korak po korak*).

These rejections, however, are at best partial. While these films offer critiques of the dominant narrative, they also partially play into it, or offer reasons to justify the ways things played out. Furthermore, the films place the narrative ownership firmly on one side (although one tries to slightly push that boundary): they present the war as a two-sided story in which the sides are divided by ethnicity, and their story is thus an “our,” Croatian story. In what follows, I provide short summaries of all three films, then move on to show what they do – and what they mean as attempts to contest the dominant memory.

4.1.1.1 The film stories

Based on a play by a prominent Croatian playwright Mate Matišić, *Ničiji sin* tells the story of Ivan, a 36-year old war veteran who lost both legs in the war. Once a lively young musician, he now lives with his parents after his wife left him, disillusioned by the day-to-day reality. His father Izidor is running for political office, and Ivan's drunken escapades are not helping his campaign; but Izidor's power as the local politician and prominent ex-Yugoslav dissident figure enables him to get his son repeatedly out of trouble. A Serb returnee and former chief of police during the Communist regime, Simo, shows up one day to blackmail Izidor regarding his past, claiming also he is Ivan's real father; Ivan was born out of his affair with Simo's wife, Ana, while Izidor was imprisoned for political reasons – at Simo's initiative. To protect her family, Ana kills Simo. Izidor and Ana decide to hide the encounter and murder from Ivan (as it could

shatter his already fragile mental state). Yet Ivan learns of the events, leading him to re-question his own family, identity (is he a Croat or a Serb?) and participation in the war.

Crnci follows members of a military unit (the titular Blacks) in Eastern Slavonia on a mission to retrieve the dead bodies of their colleagues from a mine field. The men died the night before in an unauthorized mission during a ceasefire. Badly prepared, stressed and plagued by a sense of guilt over torturing Serb civilians in the basement of their station, the unit members turn against each other, and all but one is killed or commits suicide.

Finally, based on a collection of stories by Lydija Scheuermann Hodak (which the director describes as based on true events; cited in Vuković, 2012), *Korak po korak*¹¹¹ tells the story of Vjera, a woman living in Osijek under siege during the war. Vjera lives alone; her husband fled for Zagreb and her son Krsto volunteered for the army. She shares her shelter with two neighbors: Dragan (opera singer and Serb) and Mara. While working as a translator for the local military unit (to save up for a bulletproof vest for Krsto), she is courted by the local military head. On the job, she meets a man, a captive named Jovan, whose past intrigues her. The two form a close friendship. Vjera helps Jovan (whose actual name is Johann Gross) apply for German citizenship and learn his history by translating his mother's diaries. Having earned the money for the vest, Vera buys it from the city dealer, only to have it stolen by two local soldiers looting the area. After learning that her husband got a military rank without spending any time in the army, Vera decides to leave him and start a new life as a writer. Years later, she publishes a book dedicated to Gross's mother, and rediscovers her passion for dancing.

4.1.1.2 Stories, plots and narrative constructedness

The three films summarized above tell very different stories, from different time periods and with different aims. Yet what they have in common is their subversive dialogue with the dominant narrative of the war, for which they also use similar means.

¹¹¹ For the film's poor critical reception, see Čegir, 2012; Krivak, 2012;

For one, all three films emphasize the construction process behind their own narrative, bringing attention to the constructed nature of storytelling about the war. They thus challenge the “naturalness and authority” (Armi Kaipainen, 2007, p. 57) of the dominant narrative, its ontological claim to “truth.” In case of *Ničiji sin* and *Crnci*, this is done through the non-linear narration employed throughout the films, which leads to significant differences between the story (the content of what is told in the films) and the plot (how the story is presented). *Ničiji sin* opens with a shot of Ivan singing in a band, juxtaposing this to his post-war face and flashes of the battlefield. These images gain their meaning only once the viewer is taken on a back-and-forth journey through different time periods and locations. This approach structurally emphasizes the film’s plot points. But in doing so, it also reveals its critical attitude to the past. Behind what the audience (of the film, but also of the war narrative) knows, there is always something revealed which puts that knowledge into question, emphasizing misinformation and uncertainty with regard to the past (in opposition to the imposed certainty of the memory narrative). This is the case with and for all characters: Ana (and the voting public) are unaware of Izidor’s collaborationist past; Izidor is unaware that Ivan is not his son; Ivan is unaware that Simo is his father, and that his war effort was thus built on what he perceives as a fraudulent identity. In *Ničiji sin*, the narrative structure perpetually reveals something new about the characters: their backgrounds, the logic to their actions and (most importantly) their motives, which often reveal themselves to be different than it initially seemed. Just as Izidor is consistently lying in the present (as a political candidate, he is often shown making-up stories he thinks people want to hear), his lies slowly unravel in the past as well. It is only Simo – the outsider – who appears to have some control over the unravelling stories. At the same time, this narrative form emphasizes – deliberately or not – the film’s own structure of argumentation. While the film rejects the dominant narrative’s story of national unity and realization of historical strivings that will benefit all as a proper interpretation of why the war was fought,

trying to offer a correction to that version of the story (see below), the narrative structure the film employs constantly reminds the viewer – by moving through space and time in a non-linear fashion – that the story the film offers, too, is only one possible interpretation, a mediated account with no guarantees to accuracy. The film’s embracing of the glorified image of the hero-soldier (see below) could thus indicate a partial disconnect between its revealing structure and its aims.¹¹²

In the case of *Crnci*, the narrative manipulation was a deliberate directorial effort. To understand why, a bit of context is required. The film was inspired by two prominent cases of torture and killing of Serb civilians in Croatia, known as “Selotejp” (Duct tape) and “Garaža” (Garage), which took place in Slavonia in 1991. Both happened under the command of the then-military commander and later parliamentarian Branimir Glavaš.¹¹³ When the script for the film was written, Glavaš was on trial for both, after the testimony by one of the men involved in the killing led to prosecuting the cases. By the time the film was released, the first and second (Supreme Court) verdict on the case had already been released, and this was widely covered in the papers. According to one of the film’s two directors, Zvonimir Jurić, while the story was inspired by news headlines involving the Glavaš case, he had never read the court documents or details of the case (as told in V. Petković, 2009). Moreover, *Crnci* was not envisioned as a war film, but rather as a film about dealing with the burden of having participated in killing civilians (as told to Stajčić, 2009).¹¹⁴ Inspired by the court cases, *Crnci* enters dialogue with the culture of silence around domestic war crimes: silence which is central to the dominant

¹¹² In fact, the film was frequently criticized for its political meandering and contradictory messages; see Luketić, 2009; Polimac, 2008.

¹¹³ Glavaš was the secretary of the County secretariat for people’s defense (Općinski sekretarijat za narodnu obranu) and later (since 7th December 1991) the formal commander of the defense of the city of Osijek. He was found guilty for ordering, or failing to prevent, the torture and murdering of eight civilians of Serbian nationality in the garage of the Secretariat (which gave the notorious case its codename), as part of a larger verdict, and sentenced to 8 years in prison. In 2016, the Supreme Court nullified the verdict due to procedural omissions, requesting a retrial. A retrial has since begun, following a bout of delays (An. S., 2018; Hina, 2017b).

¹¹⁴ In the same interview, Jurić mentions the lack of funding as one of the reasons for not developing *Crnci* as a war film: to train Serbian actors as the enemy would have taken too much time and would have been too costly.

narrative's insistence on the solely defensive nature of the war. The film's intervention was not well received by the public. Upon premiering in Pula in 2009, the film received the lowest audience rating that year. It is unlikely that the reason was the lack of craft; rather, it was likely its unpopular subversion of the narrative of the 'Homeland War'.

How does *Crnci* manipulate the narrative? Following an opening shot of a black cat nurturing her kittens in a darkened space, *Crnci* cuts to a shot of soldiers sitting in a vehicle. The first third of the film follows the unit on what looks like a military operation. Yet it soon dissipates into frustration and conflict – escalating into a shootout among the soldiers. The film then goes back in time to 24 hours before these events, revealing the story behind the mission. The nature of the mission (retrieving dead bodies), some information about the characters and the torture operation going on in the basement are all revealed.

Crnci has been extensively discussed for its contribution to the wartime narrative, and the role of its complex narrative structure in the process (Mortimer, 2012; Pavičić, 2011b; Radić, 2010). The film starts by establishing itself as telling the familiar story of the war. It then reveals its constructed nature, pointing at the inevitably constructed – and incomplete – nature of all war narratives, including the dominant narrative it aims to subvert. This is done through two methods. One, the film is anchored within real-life events, using references to familiar instances of war crimes. Two, audiovisual materials from the war period are remediated (see Erll, 2009) to establish the film-story as the “real” story of the war. The referenced visual material is a clip of Croatian army soldiers walking through green landscapes, filmed by the late Gordan Lederer. This footage, set to the Dire Straits song *Brothers in Arms*, was frequently played on television during the war, and its stylized appropriation serves to trigger in the audience the familiar ideas of soldiers' heroism (for an analysis of this, see Pavičić, 2011b). The remediated audio materials – such as the audio recording of the ceasefire announcement by the head military commander at the time, Anton Tus – also link the fictional narrative to the

time and place of the non-fictional crimes. The film thus re-enacts the official narrative – only to break it down in the chronological reversal, which reveals the nature of the soldiers’ mission and their operation in the garage, granting the previous scenes an entirely new meaning. By anchoring itself into the same timeline and facts as the official narrative, the filmic text makes explicit that the event of the war in fact included a lot more information than is filtered through into the dominant memory. It is not that the crimes didn’t exist, the truces were not broken; they were deliberately left out of the final story. And this was done with knowledge from a large part of society – a fact illustrated in the film through the character of the commander’s wife, who files for divorce because she has heard about what the unit is doing in the basement.¹¹⁵ To write these things out of the war narrative was an active choice on the level of the political (and sometimes military) leadership. The basement in which crimes are being committed and hidden thus also becomes the metaphorical basement in which the dirty stories of the war are kept, out of the text of the official narrative. The opening scene of the film – a shot of a cat feeding her kittens – also takes on a new meaning in retrospect: the kittens on what are revealed to be blood-stained clothes can be read to represent the post-war Croatia, and in particular its younger generations, socialized on a misleading, incomplete version of the recent past, growing out of criminal actions. At the same time, the film’s structure is obviously, visibly manipulated, as to draw attention to its own constructed nature: the fact that the film’s story is not the only possible story of the war, but simply *a* story.

If the two films discussed above create uncertainty regarding the capacity of the dominant war story to accurately and fully represent what had happened through manipulating the process of turning the story into a plot (and, in the case of *Crnci*, remediation of previously existing materials¹¹⁶), *Korak po korak* takes a different strategy. The story is here emplotted in

¹¹⁵ On the strategies and reasons for tolerating crime during wartime, see Petković, 2013.

¹¹⁶ It is worth noting that *Ničiji sin* is not free from remediation either, although it is not as pronounced as in *Crnci* – and its usage doesn’t appear to be deliberately subversive. The encounter in the film between Ivan and his veteran friend, himself a disabled person, includes a shot of the two men racing down a running track in their wheelchairs

a predominantly linear manner, turning to flashbacks only when illustrating Jovan's story, and that of his mother's (brought into the film through her diary). Similar to *Crnci*, the screen image is here filled with familiar images and sounds from the war, such as the "Osijek nikad neće biti Ocek"¹¹⁷ poster hanging outside of Vjera's window, or the original news coverage from the conflict; these are remediated to anchor the film within an extradiegetic time and place. But *Korak po korak* turns its own seeming attempts at establishing an illusion of unmediated reality unravelling on the screen upside-down: the event is historical, yet everything about it is caricatured, including overplaying the common stereotypes. Characters' encounters and engagements often seem deliberately, provocatively staged. Vjera's house, with its shelling holes, looks like a part of a film set, rather than a real house. The characters of the soldiers all act as types. The film opens with a scene of a man walking across mine fields with pillows tied to his feet: a symbolic reference to those who tried to survive in an impossible situation, but also a surreal, funny scene – in contrast to its danger-filled content – which sets the tone of the film. Enemy soldiers (who take on the stereotype official narrative could easily incorporate) are shown as not just evil, but caricature-like evil (see also section below) and also comically, exaggeratedly stupid: in one scene, they let Gross pass into enemy territory because they don't understand what he is saying. Instead of fragmenting its narration to reflect on its own artificiality, the filmic text filters its story through a humorous, exaggerated, often bizarre lens, drawing attention to its own mediated narrative as a construct. This lies in stark opposition to the stories – and in particular the war story it dialogically engages with – being presented as closed, finalized, truth-embodying and thus non-dialogical, non-questionable.

– a scene that is familiar from American films on the Vietnam War. Ivan's flashback scenes, filled with large explosions, also bring to mind the Hollywood war film genre. In other words, while *Crnci* remediates material from the 'Homeland War', *Ničiji sin* draws on the history of (American) war film to make itself recognizable. This is likely partially due to counting on the familiarity of domestic audiences with those films; but more importantly, it comes from the Hollywood war film serving as the remediated matrix for the representation of the 'Homeland War'; see on this (Senjković, 2002a).

¹¹⁷ 'Osijek will never be Ocek', the popular wartime slogan, implying that the city will not be taken over by the Yugoslav / Serbian forces, symbolically encapsulated in the difference between the Latin and Cyrillic spelling of its name.

4.1.1.3 *Dialogue through characters*

Thus far, I have argued that all three films provide a critique of the dominant narrative's claim to truth about the 'Homeland War' by bringing into question the status of narrative – any narrative, including their own – as “true” and definitive. In two cases, this is done primarily through the storytelling structure: the filmic stories are emplotted in a way that brings the viewer's attention to their constructed nature. In the case of *Korak po korak*, the strategy of shifting back-and-forth through time and place is also supplemented by the film's visual and character design, which both emphasize its surreal quality.

The films' critique does not stop at the level of storytelling organization. It is most visible in the films' characters: both in their choice and their portrayal, often made as if in response to the dominant story. *Ničiji sin* counters the dominant narrative's emphasis on national unity and the war as the moment of heroic national struggle and pride by subverting the character of the politician; *Crnci* deconstructs the image of the hero-soldier; and *Korak po korak* moves the focus from the war as a victorious national experience to the war as an everyday situation, placing at its center a strong female character. Standard characters in the war narrative – domestic soldiers, enemy soldiers, members of the international community etc. – are here, in contrast, reinvented and critically scrutinized.

In *Ničiji sin*, it is the character of the politician that is the focus of narrative deconstruction. In the film, Izidor is lying, making stories up as he goes, twisting events into his own fraudulent narrative (as in the case of a police inspector whom he awards for his help, only to accuse him of taking bribery later, leading to the inspector's suspension). He also twists an old narrative of his own historical heroism for political campaigning: he served prison time for his participation in the “Croatian spring,” a youth movement for the liberalization of the regime, and is now trying to present it as his historical fight for Croatian statehood. By revealing Izidor's stories – the narrative coming from a politician – as lies or at best fiction, the film

subverts the source of the war narrative: the top-down, political structures which have used the power to create the narrative to their own advantage. This is underlined by Ivan's familial relationship to Izidor. The family holds secrets and conceals the truth from Ivan, the veteran – only to reveals itself as one without blood ties Ivan assumed it holds (Izidor is in fact not his biological father). The family unit here can be read as standing in for the national “family” that the dominant narrative implies; the unity of the nation-family is thus also revealed as fictional, although the dominant war narrative implies otherwise. It is in fact only individuals like Izidor who benefit from this story, as their election is based on others believing their fraudulent narratives. The film thus uses the character of the politician to dialogically respond to the collectivist insistence on national unity and the war as a culmination of national – collective – interest, pointing out the particular interests behind it and the manipulation it helps ensure (Izidor relies on the voters believing his story). The war narrative is problematic because its central promise – that the war was fought for the common interest – is a lie. Instead, it was fought for people like Izidor, who profit from independence with voters' support; but not fought for people like Ivan, who sacrificed their health, stability (as implied by Ivan's relationship with his ex-wife and son) and possible life trajectories and are now left with nothing.

Crnci shows less interest in political structures, focusing instead on the central character in the war narrative: the soldier. Previous section elaborated on the role of chronological reversal in the film. This reversal is also a part of the film's deconstruction of the soldier-hero. In one of the film's first scenes, the camera is positioned in the back of a van, showing (through the windshield) a soldier breaking a shop window to steal some bananas. The scene announces the film's subversion of the soldier-as-hero character: the soldier's first act involves not heroism, but rule-breaking out of sheer will. The soldier in *Crnci* is an active character from the start, which is also a dialogical act. The paradox of the dominant narrative is that Croatia is simultaneously both a victim and a victor. In cinema, this often reflected as a specific kind of

passivity: Croatian characters were not shown taking any kind of action; this included the soldier, who was hardly ever shown in combat (Pavičić, 2011b). *Ničiji sin* sticks to this representation, as it positions the soldier as the ultimate hero, thus allowing him little agency during wartime: Ivan is a concentration camp survivor and is only seen following orders; he is primarily shown as a sufferer – both during and after the war – and not a doer. *Crnci* turns the soldier into an action-taker: soldiers go on a mission, break the siege, break the law by torturing civilians. Their actions are consistently revealed to be non-heroic: the narrative structure presents us with the hero-image, only to deconstruct it as it progresses. In the process, the theft scene takes on a new meaning. The first time we see it, it looks like nothing more than a small act of misbehaving. Yet as the soldiers' other actions are shown, the scene appears different, revealing the relevance of the interpretive context within which the action is read in determining its meaning: it becomes a symptom of a more serious kind of “misbehavior.” The film thus reveals the gap in reducing the character of the soldier to a hero-image; instead, there were different soldiers during the war, a plurality of characters that cannot be reduced to one image once the narrow interpretive context of the dominant narrative (the illusion of a completely defensive war) is rejected.¹¹⁸ A more context-focused, specific evaluation is needed instead.

Korak po korak does not focus so much on subverting the image of the soldier (although that too is done; see discussion below) as on profiling and placing the focus on a set of usually unexplored characters, whose mere presence re-centers the focus of the narrative. To explore how this is done, a brief reflection on Chapter II is needed. As I posited there, while the narrative of war is most often associated with the heroism of the soldier, this is not the only way in which it can be utilized. The “heroic struggle” can be stretched and twisted to fit a number of other potential characters: the heroic work of the medics to save soldiers; the day-to-day work of

¹¹⁸ The narrative break is not fully in line with the model soldier idea either: the soldiers in the first third of the film, in fact, act confused, aggressive, lying, illogical and violent towards each other. Yet it is once again only the unraveling of the narrative that places this within the interpretive context: the cue as to how to understand it is given only retroactively.

people who continued doing their jobs for the benefit of the country; the sacrifice of the mothers and widows, who gave their sons/husbands to the country. These contributions are not seen as individualized acts. Rather, they are a reflection of the nation and interesting only so far as they say something about it: celebrated acts of types of people who contributed to the national goal. This is precisely why I speak of the narrative schematic template: the template – encompassing the dominant narrative – captures both the essence of the war story and its flexibility. The character of the mother is particularly interesting in this context, as mothers were frequently presented in the media of the 1990s as women bearing the weight of the war most strongly, having given birth to the country's warriors.¹¹⁹

The character of Vjera is a mother, and it is a defining point of her identity. But she is also unremarkable in her involvement with the war. She does not send her son, Krsto, off willingly to defend the country; rather, she'd prefer him staying home, or at least transferred to a less dangerous location. She refuses to take on a heroic role for herself as a mother of a soldier, rejecting also the idea of sending her son off to battle and playing the role of a national heroine (the grieving mother) for the sake of a more glorious plot. Vjera is a woman trying to survive in a situation of everyday chaos. The film reinforces the focus on the ordinary of the everyday also through the individuals she is surrounded by. She relies mostly on the support of her neighbor, also a woman, with whom Vjera shares food and shelter. Vjera's other close associate is a Serb opera singer, Dušan – until he is taken away by rogue Croat soldiers. The character of Dušan is far from the dominant representation of Serb characters: he is neither evil nor

¹¹⁹ The most prominent case is that of Kata Šoljić, the woman whose four sons died as soldiers during the war. Šoljić was awarded multiple decorations by various veterans' associations, including an honor given to her by president Tuđman; in 2016, a park in the country's capital was named after her. The character of the mother was also well represented in 1990s cinema, in which the mother's heroic fight to retrieve the dead body of her soldier-son (*Vrijeme za.../A Time for...*, 1999), struggle to reunite with her son (*Andele moj dragi/My dear angel*, 1996) or pregnancy as such (*Bogorodica/Madonna*, 1999) were proxies for both the sacrifice and heroism of the Croatian nation. See Gilić, 2014.

aggressive, but likeable. Moreover, he is a civilian in the everyday war reality, not a soldier and a “natural,” ethnicity-defined enemy.

Korak po korak also heavily complicates the black-and-white simplicity of the dominant narrative. One, it offers an unflattering portrayal of the Croatian soldiers, who are here womanizers, inefficient bureaucrats, cruel torturers, inexperienced teenagers – but not heroes. A minority of the soldiers are also looters, and exercise power rather than show solidarity with Vjera, their compatriot (e.g. when stealing the vest Vjera bought for her son). Serb soldiers are portrayed with a standard negativity (see below); but some of the very negative characters are also Croatian, such as the old school friend Vjera turns to for help with buying the vest and who is shown making a profit on dealing illegal imports and looted goods. This plethora of characters (including a member of the international community who is only after prostitutes, etc.) makes up for a complex, caricatural yet decisively non-black-and-white world, in which ethnicity does not shape morality and victimhood is not attached to nationality.

The first victim of the war here is the normalcy of the everyday life and social order. This is represented primarily through female characters, but also by artists and other minorities (such as Gross) who do not fit in the “us/them” divide. The enemy is twofold. For the Croatian soldiers, the enemy are the Serb and JNA forces. But Vjera’s – and society’s – enemy is also masculinity, which drove negative historical changes (sketched through references to Communism) and made the war happen by making it appear honorable and as the only choice. Krsto wants to fight in the war for all these reasons, although he is not prepared for the army. The war is also made attractive through media propaganda; the latter is clearly seen when Vjera encounters one of her former students, who refuses her offer of a warm hat by stating he has a tank and is thus fully protected. The pop-cultural version of the war he was promised – owing in no small amount to the Hollywoodization of the conflict (see Senjković, 2002a) – ends up being a lie as he is killed by Serb forces. The same disenchantment with the real vs. mediated

war is also seen in scenes where a military unit composed of young men is forced to exchange discussions about music (an allusion to the media-constructed image of the Croatian soldier as a young, hip man) with hiding from real bullets being fired.

4.1.1.4 Narrative ownership

In terms of narrative ownership, there is a change over time across the three films; while two films are specifically addressing a Croatian audience, implicitly relying on the previously established distinction between “us” and “them,” one partially breaks that division. *Ničiji sin* presents the war as a “Croatian” story: even if the dominant story of the war is deceptive, this does not change the fact that it was the Croat soldiers who were heroes, while the enemy – inserted through the proxy of Simo – is most notable precisely for being a Serb. While he is a local who had been resettled due to war, the story of the war is in no way “his” to tell. The film takes the stance – stronger than even some renderings of the dominant narrative – that ethnicity is the base for division between “us” (Croats) and “them”, between “our” and “their” stories.

Crnci brings in the possibility that the war was also a Serb story, by thematizing the killing of civilian victims because of their “wrong” ethnicity. Yet the victims themselves are not in focus, but rather the impact their existence has on the Croatian narrative of the war. In this sense, it still addresses a narrower “us”. The civilian victims, never shown on screen, are a catalyst for dismantling and re-building a story, “our” story, rather than having a voice in it. But who is “us” in a substantial sense here? Is the distinction ethnic? Or is it more complex than that? The film does not explicitly pose these questions; yet by focusing on the Croatian war crimes and war guilt – and without any attempts to complicate the national identification – it allows itself to be read within the standard, ethnic “us/them” divide.

Korak po korak goes a step further and includes a Serb character into the film as a presence. Vjera’s Serb neighbor, Dragan, is shown not as an adversary but as a friend whom she shares shelter with. He is also shown being taken away in broad daylight by Croat soldiers.

The scene is a reminder that these kinds of violent acts were tolerated (if not encouraged) by the regime, but also that ethnicity did not automatically determine one's position in wartime: Dragan was not an enemy soldier. The step from implied civilian victim in *Crnci* to a visible one is meaningful. The victim in *Korak po korak* has a name, an identity, a presence; he is not merely a catalyst to the victor's trauma. His war experience is shown to be the same day-to-day experience as that of Vjera, only exacerbated by the outside judgement of him taking a side that is not "his own". In this sense, *Korak po korak* makes explicit that the war story it tells is not an ethnicity-based, but an experience-based story: the film's narrative belongs to Dragan as well, even if he is the side-character, and the focalization (the point of view offered to the viewer in the film) is not his. He owns the right to this narration of the war.

4.1.1.5 Subverting the critique

Finally, there are also ways in which all three films play into the dominant narrative: they simultaneously offer criticism and reinforcement to it, or at the very least do not critically respond to certain of its elements, allowing them to coexist with the critique. *Ničiji sin* adopts the dominant narrative's glorification of the soldier-hero: Ivan's disappointment in life is shown to a great extent to be a result of a society that rejects him, failing to recognize and honor his sacrifice for them. The society is shown so unaccommodating of Ivan and those like him that the men are forced to turn their back on their values (as implied by a scene in which Ivan encounters a colleague who has himself become active in politics, and is presented as a sellout speaking the official narrative verbatim) or self-destruct (as Ivan does in the end, when he is beaten to death by other veterans while chanting a Serb war song). The film also adopts a modified version of the enemy as barbarically evil, both in wartime and post-war. In captivity, Ivan is made to run through mine fields. The film's Serb character, Simo, is presented as lying, deceptive and extortionist, with no other motive than to benefit from his situation as much as he can. Simo's historical malice (he was a politically powerful chief of police during

Yugoslavia, and he used that power to imprison Izidor and force Ana into an affair) reinforces the story of a long-standing ethnic hatred and asymmetry of power in Yugoslavia (at the expense of Croats) – even if here it doesn't “naturally” culminate in a war. Finally, Simo's manipulation underpins even Izidor's own: had Simo not blackmailed him, history could have turned out differently. The film thus offers an opportunity to interpret the war as an act of Serb manipulation, keeping an element of the idea of Croatia as a country-victim even as it rejects it in the official narrative. At best, the film offers a contradictory story.

Crnci does not directly reinforce the dominant narrative, but it does leave space for agreement with it. One, the film seems to imply is that the titular unit is acting at own discretion, meaning there is no higher chain of command that approved of torture. This makes the soldiers' actions open to interpretation as a singular, isolated incident – and the war can be said to have had instances of unsuitable behavior, but this doesn't say much about the bigger picture. Two, the film's focus on the soldiers' own difficulty in dealing with the torture (one takes drugs, one consumes alcohol, all are stressed out) shifts the focus from the victims to the soldiers themselves as victimized characters in the war. The soldiers' side-stories (the brother of one of the soldiers was killed in the failed mission; another member of the unit was responsible) contribute to the depiction of soldiers as themselves victimized. This does not mean that the film embraces national victimhood narrative: the dominant war memory cannot incorporate these kinds of characters without contradiction. The film opens a valid question of whom the war victimizes and whom it benefits, and how one should discuss the very real presence of perpetrator psychological damage and trauma (see e.g. Grossman, 1995; MacNair, 2002; Maguen et al., 2010); yet it does so at the expense of taking the focus off from its own crucial intervention into the war narrative.

Korak po korak, finally, risks drowning its wartime critique with excursions both into a critique of Communism and stereotypical representations of certain characters (LGBTQ in

particular). The film thus embraces a number of stereotypes: from its depiction of Communists as amoral (partially feeding into the narratives of the 1990s; see Chapter III) to its effeminate portrayal of homosexuals, in stark contrast to its message of female empowerment. All of these tend to dilute the film's critical message with regard to the dominant narrative.

4.1.2 One war, many voices: The (unrealized) polyphony of Vinko Brešan's films

The previous subsection explored films that enter a critical dialogue with the dominant narrative of the past. This section continues that analysis on a different set of films. I analyze two films – *Svjedoci* (*Witnesses*, 2003) and *Nije kraj* (*Will Not End Here*, 2008) – made by the Croatian director Vinko Brešan. These films critically respond to the same dominant narrative. In doing this, they share some similarities with films discussed in the earlier section. They too use fragmented, non-linear narration to point out to the inconsistencies behind the (monologic, linear) dominant narrative, revealing their own constructedness – and thus rejecting the claim to truth-telling – in the process. The two films also revolve firmly around the character of the soldier – a character they modify and complicate in response to the glorification of the soldier in the dominant narrative, turning the “soldier” into multiple, different soldier-characters.

Yet these films go a step further in their dialogue, employing a particular additional strategic element. They don't simply open a dialogue on the complexity of the war, instead attempting to let the characters themselves speak of it, voicing their own visions and positions. By insisting on the multiplicity of perspectives and narratives that arise from different interpretive contexts, these films structurally challenge the key feature of the narrative scheme: its monologism, with its claim on the monopoly of truth and closedness to dialogue. The films earlier discussed deemed the official narrative to be incomplete or fraudulent, thus challenging its truthfulness. The films discussed below, apart from showing the same incompleteness, insist also on more exploration of power and diversity, different worldviews, motivations and origins of characters' behavior, to demonstrate that one narrative isn't and cannot be enough. I treat the

latter strategy of dialogical engagement as an attempt at *polyphony*, one of the most interesting (and also most debated) ideas that have originated from Bakhtin's work. In order to show how this idea is used through film, I first introduce the concept of polyphony and explain why the emphasis here is on trying – and ultimately failing – to reach the polyphonic ideal.

4.1.2.1 Polyphony

Polyphony is, for Bakhtin, an idea tied to strategies of writing, formal ways of including different characters' words into the written text and the relationship of the author towards those voices (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 232). To achieve polyphony is for the author to allow different characters to speak from their own societal positions, without the author trying to impose a unifying vision, a single way of thinking through them. Not only does polyphony imply that the characters do not just repeat “no-man's sentences,” but that what they say are things firmly engrained into who they are (not just in language, for that would be “simple” polyglossia); it also implies that the author enters into an open dialogue with the characters themselves, letting them surprise him as they develop (see Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 234–246). It is easy to see why polyphony is, in literature (for the analysis of which the term originates), a rare feat: it is a demanding requirement which also makes a lot of assumptions about the workings of the author. In this dissertation, polyphony is thus understood in a more accommodating version, with the emphasis less on the creative process (on which it is difficult to make assumptions) and more on the outcome. A polyphonic filmic text would allow for clashing, debate and disagreement between significantly different characters; this wouldn't lead to a clear resolution or an ending that ties together and resolves all the tensions, or offer the position of one character as superior and implied an authorial position throughout.

If the filmic text is a “polyphonic play of voices” (Stam, 1991, p. 255), the different voices are speakers of different languages. Language is here understood not just a communicative tool, but as a social act, originating from one's position in society, the roles one

plays and the differences in seeing the world that are associated with it. Seen like this, polyphony can also be seen as a term elevated from formal structures and brought closer to the issues of ideology and worldview, charged with “semantic instability” (Flanagan, 2009). Different characters’ voices come from different realities, and also shape reality differently; their speech reflects their reality, introducing it to the viewer, offering an understanding of the complexity and multi-facetedness of societal positionings and their emerging narratives.¹²⁰

Yet as useful as polyphony is as an exploratory concept, it is a high-raised bar, hardly ever fulfilled. A more modest endeavour here would be to speak of Brešan’s films as examples of the Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia– multi-voicedness, the presence of different voices embodied in different characters – than of polyphony. But to assume these films strive to reach a level of dialogue inherent in polyphony doesn’t simply mean that the films allow the characters to “battle out their differences” (Flanagan, 2009). It also emphasizes the importance of allowing different, even contradicting voices to shape a historical narrative of an event, in this case the ‘Homeland War’. A polyphonic representation of a singular event will necessarily be non-finite, contradictory, messy and remaining without closure. This does not make it impossible to narrate an event; rather, the claim is rather that a polyphonic narrative of an event can never be finite or told as a singular one, a narrative, but is always a plurality.

In many ways, such “messiness” is in stark contradiction to the idea of collective memory, which requires relatively simple narratives that everyone in a group can share. It is also the reason why the films analyzed here are different from those analyzed in the previous

¹²⁰ A note on moving the concept of polyphony from written text to film is in order. Polyphony is not seen as a feature of the text tied to focalization, and especially not one that would be tied to the camera movement. The eye of the camera is not the one directing the viewer into a certain character’s position; the framing is not a shortcut for understanding various voices (cf. last section of this Chapter). This is in line with the films’ separation of characters’ discourse from the information the viewer learns off the screen. Whether this is a proper, or the only possible reading of polyphony when applied to film remains open for discussion – as does its suitability to apply it to films where semantic instability is in fact not aligned with any of the characters’ language (in *Svjedoci*) or is only occasionally vaguely so (in *Nije kraj*) – meaning the characters’ discourse does not entirely shape the information for the viewer (cf. an approach more insistant on the latter in Flanagan, 2009).

section. Both groups of films call for an expansion and change of the dominant narrative of the war, as well as point out the uncertainty of any narrative's claim to truth. Yet these films remind the viewer that to have *a narrative* will always be an impossible project by directly showing how different voices cannot be brought into a unison resolution on the war. I argue below that the two films discussed here come short of the highly set-up bar: the characters are never quite allowed to clash and enter a free dialogue that is announced. Thus the filmic texts ultimately fail at completely satisfying both defining accounts of polyphony: the “dialogic sense of truth” and the “special position of the author” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 234). In the process, however, they get the critical response to the dominant narrative across, which is what is of relevance here. Instead of finalization, they offer striving.

Having explained this, it remains to be established what these films are about, and how they enter into dialogue with the dominant narrative, as well as how the addition of (an attempt at) polyphonic organization of the filmic text assists them in this process.

4.1.2.2 *The film stories*

The first film to explicitly discuss war crimes committed by members of the Croatian army during the war (Jurak, 2011),¹²¹ *Svjedoci* is an adaptation of the acclaimed novel *Ovce od gipsa* (*Alabaster Sheep*) by the novelist and public intellectual Jurica Pavičić. The film and the book are loosely based on an event that occurred in December 1991, when a group of five members of the Croatian army killed a civilian of Serb ethnicity in his home in Zagreb, then kidnapped and killed his wife and young daughter at a nearby mountain resort.¹²² The film's treatment of these events in comparison to the crime caused controversy, with the film being described as “morally questionable” (Radić, 2004, 2013) for its adaptation of the crime to fit a more moderate narrative. At the same time, the film has often been discussed as a crucial piece of

¹²¹ First film that hinted at the crimes was *Sigurna kuća* (2001); see Chapter VI.

¹²² For more details on the case, see *Sažeti izvještaj i kronologija procesuiranja zločina u Pakračkoj Poljani i Zagrebu*, 2016.

work in rejecting the dominant narrative, a critical work of art against nationalist propaganda (Crnković, 2006, 2012; Iordanova, 2007; Šošić, 2009).¹²³ Already on the level of the film's story, it is clear why it is relevant in the context of memory-making. The story it tells was not unknown to the public; yet its articulation in a film made it resonate publicly more than a novel or court documents. In interviews, Brešan frequently noted his desire to make a film that approaches the war in a novel way, especially at a time when the topic of war crimes committed by Croatian soldiers was not widely discussed (as said to Vidan & Crnković, 2012, p. 119).

In *Svjedoci*, three Croatian soldiers' plan to mine the home of a rich local Serb ends up in his accidental killing. The only witness to what happened – his young daughter – is kidnaped. The men want to kill the girl, with support of the youngest soldier – Joško's – mother, who is devastated after recently losing her husband in battle and is unwilling to also lose her son over his act. Yet Joško's brother Krešo, himself a veteran, refuses to allow this. The police investigation is obstructed by the local politician, but the soldiers' plan is uncovered by the local journalist who, together with Krešo, rescues the girl and gets her across the border.

In *Nije kraj*, a comedy that raised a lot less criticism, an ex-soldier from Croatia, Martin, goes to Serbia to buy off a porn star (Desa) through the help of a Roma porn actor (also the film's narrator), Đuro. He allows her to start a new life, and they fall in love – only for her to learn that he is responsible for killing her husband, a rebel Serbs' leader in Croatia, and now wants to make things right before his own death from a brain tumor.

¹²³ There are different evaluations of Brešan's other films and their impact on nationalist ideology in Croatia in the literature as well. Some of them are conflicting: from Crnković's affirmative evaluation of the films as reevaluations of the past subversive to dominant ideology (Crnković, 2012, p. 200) to Levi's critical reading of *Kako je počeo rat na mom otoku*, in which the author reads the film as a breaking of certain kind of nationalist discourse at the expense of promoting others (Levi, 2007, pp. 132–134). While I am not convinced by Levi's own argumentation – that the film promotes ethnohomophobic content – this chapter does share his skepticism with regard to the director's opus being read as solely a critical, subversive one.

4.1.2.3 *Narrative and characters in dialogue with the past*

The two films take a similar dialogical response to the dominant narrative as those analyzed in the previous section. They too anchor themselves within the familiar story of the war: *Svjedoci* by drawing on a real-life story and fictionalizing it, and *Nije kraj* by adopting, for its main character, the image of the soldier as a cool young man (see Chapter III) – in stark contrast to the mediated image of the enemy. They also offer a complex narrative structure in which novel information is perpetually revealed and new angles offered, pointing to the stories behind the official story, at the same time bringing attention to the constructed nature of all war stories (including the films' own). And by engaging with and breaking down the common characters in the dominant narrative – most notably the hero-soldier, but also others – they reveal the failure of such simplified characterizations at capturing the complex war story.

Svjedoci employs a particularly interesting narrative strategy. The film starts with the killing of the man, but then goes back to offer the same event from a different perspective, clarifying and giving context for things the viewer already saw, often revealing their meaning to be different than what was implied in the first viewing. Thus, for example, what looks like a scene in which a neighbor implicates the young men in the house for the crime (as he has seen their suspicious behavior) reveals itself to be an act of him telling the police inspector of the tragedy that befell the house they were hiding in: all men of the house were soldier-heroes, one of them just buried, and the inspector should not intervene in their grief by investigating the death of a random Serb character. Moreover, the film also frequently returns to the past to give context to things. An example is the scene in which the viewer learns that the war injury of one of the brothers, Krešo, was not a consequence of his heroism on the battlefield (and thus a visual cue employed by the film to make him instantly recognizable as a soldier-hero) but was in fact the result of his brother's careless act of detonating a mine out of boredom. As in previous subsection, the fragmented narration helps in defining and shaping the characters (see below).

It also works strategically, in that it revealing layers of stories that challenge the superficial dominant narrative, simultaneously drawing attention to the film's own constructed nature – the fact that the film, too, is just *a story* rather than the definitive war story. The film does not need to solve the crime for the viewer (the audience, unlike the police, knows who the perpetrators are). Instead, it presents various perspectives on the same narrative (Mihailović, 2012), pushing the audience to fill in the unexplained story elements (Why was there a gunshot in the end? Who is the witness?) and having them re-questioned by the film.

Nije kraj employs a complex structure in a different way, in which a narrator tells the story from the end, returning to the middle, then unraveling events that led to it and occasionally venturing into horizontal expansion (meaning linear narration is intersected with moments of observing past or parallel events). The narration also occasionally “loses” its narrator, with the film telling the viewer stories he is unlikely to know (or it is not clear how he would know them). Again, the fragmented narration reveals the stories behind the stories, while reminding the viewer of the film's narrative constructedness. This is additionally emphasized through the figure of the narrator, who is at the same time seen as a character and as a storyteller, and is established as the audience's guiding voice solely through his likeability. What starts off as a comedy about a porn film reveals itself to be something completely else – reminding the viewer that there is more to every story than what can be immediately seen (cf. *Crnci* above).

Both films also respond to the dominant narrative's simplified characterizations by once again complicating the character of the soldier, as well as rewriting and introducing other characters of their own. The soldier is here broken down into multiple soldier-characters, revealing how a single heroic image is incapable of encompassing the complexity of the war situation. In *Syjedoci*, the soldier is a complex plurality rather than a singular character. Soldier characters are seen engaging in combat, keeping prisoners and – as in the case of the three men – killing innocent civilians. They are also seen acting in significantly different ways, reacting

to things differently, bringing different assumptions about the responsible and moral thing to do in combat and beyond: differences that cannot be reconciled and subsumed under one. The soldier would, to remain a singular character, have to be a war criminal and a protector, a rule-follower and a rogue – things simply irreducible to a middle ground.

Nije kraj also reworks the character of the soldier. Martin appears at first to be a model hero, a precise sniper shooter who refuses to kill civilians (even at the encouragement of his own men). Yet the shot that he pulls is less than heroic, as the man he kills is shot in his own home, and thus arguably not a combatant at the time. His post-war actions are not always commendable either: his act of finding Desa arises out of combination of love and guilt, not out of principle; he engages in a problematic activity to buy her off, selling stolen maps of mass graves to families of missing persons; he kills a man to assist a friend. The other soldiers, Martin's unit colleagues, are shown as being even farther from the narrative ideal-types, both in the past (they cheer for Martin to shoot not only Vojvoda, but also Desa, before she "makes a fuss") and in the present (where they work as hitmen, robbers and mafia bosses).

Other characters in both films show the same kind of incompatibility with the dominant narrative, with *Svjedoci* being the more interesting of the two. In the film, the character of the mother is willing to let a child die to save her own son; the local politician and state attorney are shown protecting the killers rather than punishing them, because the victim was of wrong ethnicity; and all this is enabled by other, "ordinary" citizens. In portraying all these characters, *Svjedoci* posits its own version of how the dominant narrative was built: through structural political intervention (which protected "our boys" from positions of power) and lack of resistance from citizens, who bought into it and refused to let go (even as lives were in question, and often for personal gain). Yet through characters of the inspector and journalist, who struggle to learn what had really happened, resistance is also implied, and the film's warning against assuming homogeneity of any group – including the nation. *Nije kraj* pokes fun at the idea

homogenization by showing how, for certain classes, war differences are expressed in language (Martin is thus known as “Ustaša” by Desa’s prostitute friends), but are not in any sense meaningful: illegal business thrives between the two countries in the post-war period, and Croatian policemen are shown to be big fans of Desa (whether or not they know her history).

For both films, this also indicates an attempt to complicate the category of the enemy. In *Svjedoci*, the enemy is shown as a familiar brutal figure (using a woman as a live shield in combat); but other enemy characters are young men, prisoners of war, who clearly did not come to fight for reasons of deep ethnic hatred but were likely drafted into the war – and who try to warn Joško of the mine he eventually activates. Similarly, in *Nije kraj*, ethnicity as the defining character of the enemy is brought into question. The warlord, Vojvoda, is the stereotype. Yet there is also the civilian local Serb,¹²⁴ Desa, who is in no way engaged with the war. Ethnicity thus becomes separated from the enemy status.

4.1.2.4 *Who speaks?*

So far, I have discussed how the two films utilize strategies familiar from the previous subchapter. But what is polyphonic about these films that sets them apart? The answer is, they both attempt to open up space for the experience of different characters. Where they ultimately fail is in allowing those characters to truly speak their own positions, which get drowned by the films’ overarching message. I elaborate on this claim below.

In *Svjedoci*, the viewer gets information to construct the position of each of the characters, who are situated radically differently. The challenge is thus to both see how same terms gain different meaning for them – e.g. the idea of protection to a soldier, a grieving mother or a journalist feeling responsible for the life of a child – and to rethink from an outsider position the value of characters’ positions and stances, including their own arguments. In the process,

¹²⁴ That this character is a woman (and a beautiful woman at that) plays into stereotypes of female weakness, somewhat taking away from this otherwise relevant point.

they are all given space to an extent: the grieving mother's deception of the police officer and even her willingness to sacrifice a child for her son are contextualized just as much as Krešo's strong resistance to being complicit in committing a murder. Their positions are shown to arise both out of their social positioning and their inner moral stances, and the film does not make the viewer believe that the choice is easy (e.g. it is conflicting for everyone to kill the girl). The power relations between all characters are also expressed through language.¹²⁵ Different worldviews are exchanged in a particular setting, and they shape or limit further behavior of the characters. The latter is especially important, as it lies at the heart of what Morson and Emerson consider a budding polyphony: the talk between the characters really moves their actions forward (Morson & Emerson, 1990, Chapters 247–251). This is true even for unexpected encounters. In a scene precluding the accident that will lead to Krešo's injury, the young Serb soldiers try to stop Joško from touching one of the artefacts in the small roadside shrine, a plaster sheep, by warning him that the installation has been mined. Joško, reluctant to believe them due to "who" they are, still throws a rock at it, launching catastrophic consequences. That these characters get to speak for themselves is a remarkable feat compared to earlier treatments of Serb characters in Croatian films, in which they are dominantly seen as villains who can only express revenge and hatred. That an encounter between them and another character, even if minor, has a potential to lead to significant story-altering consequences is a testimony to the power of speaking and listening – in this case, who speaks and who listens, or doesn't. Ultimately, even the film's end arises out of a verbal conflict: that between Krešo and Joško regarding the future of the captured girl. The filmic text orchestrates all these voices in a disharmony: they disagree, enter into conflict, open up new courses of action, sometimes defy spoken word (e.g. the inspector continues his investigation despite the surgeon's verbatim

¹²⁵ A good example is the discussion between the politician/local surgeon and police inspector on what it would cost for him to perform surgery on the latter's dying wife, in which the officer is cornered to decide between two bad choices.

request to stop it, in exchange for his wife's surgery). The role of language in the film is best summed up by Crnković's detailed reading (Crnković, 2006), which shows how the key action in the film is motivated by Joško's words, namely his construction of Vasić as "other" – an idea which Joško takes directly from the dominant narrative.

The film, however, more often than not fails to allow the characters to "talk it out" in front of the viewer, giving them positioning and voice but preventing them from speaking. The narrative structure breaks down its flourishing polyphony: in continuously breaking the narrative stream, the film frequently stops the characters from responding to what has been said for the sake of unravelling the narration later on (see discussion above). Yet more is at play than simply structural issues. As the film tells a very specific, critical story of the war, it often allows the characters to speak just so much to support that story; from individual voices, they are thus restrained to being mere tools of storytelling, frequently being interrupted just as they start to speak, or used to reveal something about the plot rather than to debate it themselves. At the core of the film's narrative structure is thus a tension between wanting to expand the dominant narrative by demonstrating how one story of the war is impossible and wanting to tell a very particular – singular – story.¹²⁶ And while this story is meaningful – again, *Svjedoci* introduced the topic of domestic war crimes to film audiences – it appears partially in conflict with the film's form and style.

The attempts at polyphony in *Nije kraj* fail for the same reasons. There is, however, one difference: by moving the narration from an unidentified point of view to that of a specific character, there is a particular point of view given to it, an interpretive source. This moves away

¹²⁶ In the film's final scene, the girl is seen standing with her guardians in the sunset, safe. The scene has drawn much criticism for allegedly presenting the ending as sugarcoated and unconvincing. Yet in a sense, it represents one of the more polyphonic moments of the film, as it eschews a sense of closure: while the setting looks idealised (the girl is now safe and all is good), it also looks artificial – as if signaling that the film cannot really end like this. And it doesn't – the truth is that the viewer has no way of knowing what happens next, no idea when or where the scene takes place or what it implies. It is thus a completely open ending, one that can go anywhere from there, as if to say that it is now out of control of the text itself and its limitation.

some of the control from the (implied) author. The two main characters, Martin and Desa, also get to have some control of their stories. Yet they rarely get to do so in language, and more often act them out: the body language of the characters frequently becomes an expressive means of “fighting it out”, in Flanagan’s words (as in Desa’s resolute anger when Martin takes her to see her former home). Yet for all the space the film gives the characters, it is afraid of their actual words, and more often than not it silences them: through voiceover, through editing, through music, through Đuro’s narratorial voice. Desa in particular hardly gets the chance to tell her story; it is instead told for her, through images and other characters’ words – likely because the film fails to treat her story as meaningful to begin with, making the film solely about Martin (see discussion on narrative ownership below). Their stories are thus simultaneously given to them and taken away. Even the open ending to the film, which lends itself to interpretations (if Martin is dying, why the improvised wedding? has something changed?), requires the characters to come together in perfect harmony, to look beyond their pasts and disagreements. Moreover, the harmony was not achieved through on-screen dialogue, but is simply assumed (it is not clear how the characters end up together in the end). While the future is open and unknown, the present needs to be resolved.

Attempts to break the monologism of the dominant narrative and how this is actually done are tension-strung in both films. The polyphony of the two filmic texts discussed here is incomplete, not successful; in fact, it hangs over them like an unreachable ideal-type, serving more as a measuring rod (what could have been – what would have been) than a description of what is written in the text. For if polyphony is “[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses [...] with equal rights and each in their own world” (Bakhtin, in Flanagan, 2009, p. 128), then the two films, unable to escape the one story they want to tell, never quite reach their target, giving only glimpses of different worlds along the way.

4.1.2.5 Narrative ownership

Finally, how do the two films fare in terms of narrative ownership? Both films ultimately share the same topic: dealing with the Croatian characters' guilt and the need to make it better, by others (in *Svjedoci*) or by the perpetrator himself (in *Nije kraj*). But in the process, their strategy of letting different voices being heard produces a tension in terms of ownership, meandering between telling a "Croatian" story and broadening that same story. *Svjedoci*, for all its attempts to expand the narrative of the war, remains the story of one warring side, in which the Serb victim becomes no more than a catalyst. Yet the young Serb soldiers share the same situation and consequences as Krešo does, and thus it inevitably becomes their story, too. Yet they appear and disappear quickly, and are again used primarily to explain the plight of the two brothers.

Nije kraj is only slightly more interesting in this regard. Although starting the story as a tale about the "complicated" Serbs and Croats (as spoken by Đuro) and reminding the viewer through the character of Desa that the story of the war is not only Martin's, but also hers – not only a Croat's, but also a Croatian Serb's – it ultimately focuses on Martin. It does, however, offer a reminder that Desa, too, has an experience of the war that trespasses the usual hero/victim-perpetrator divide: Desa is the group that is hardly visible in films, the Serb civilian who got caught up in the conflict. But her experience in this sense is barely covered.¹²⁷ The two characters' stories are both similar stories of loss; yet her loss is downplayed so his position can be emphasized (e.g. nothing is ever said about Vojvoda from her point of view). *Nije kraj* thus sits uncomfortably between opening up the war narrative to the "other" and keeping the focus on "us" – ultimately still falling closer to the latter.

¹²⁷ That there are differences between Croat and Serb sides of this story in this case is not, however, simply a narrative invention, but something that (as discussed in the previous chapter) has been documented in literature (Pavlaković, 2017b; Žunec, 2007, 2008), noting that narrative of the Krajina Serbs on the origins of the war has been significantly different than that of Croats, but also in personal memory research (Benčić, 2015), which clearly shows that ending up on 'different sides' carried with itself different experiences.

4.1.3 Responding to words through silence: The war as the untold trauma-story

The films discussed thus far had entered dialogue with the dominant narrative by challenging its elements. The films discussed in this subsection take an extension of that strategy: their response to the narrative is to imply that, whatever is being said, it doesn't articulate the real story that needs to be told. These films, each in their own way, use silence as a strategy of rejecting the dominant war narrative; they present the war as a kind of unprocessed, traumatic societal event which is yet to be turned from a haunting, unspeakable experience into a told story – a process that was not realized through the creation of the dominant memory narrative, which covered up the deeper issues with a story of victory and heroism.

This form of dialogical response to the dominant narrative requires us to consider a concept that lies at its core, yet was not evoked in the earlier subchapters, namely that of trauma. The concept of trauma has in recent years proved to be particularly useful when studying collective memory, also with regard to the wars in the former Yugoslavia (D. Jelača, 2016). This interest in trauma, however, did not go without a backlash, pointing to the shifting, problematic conceptualizations when applied as a societal rather than an individual phenomenon (Kansteiner, 2004a, 2004b) – sometimes also from trauma theorists themselves, who tried to reconceptualize the term to avoid a “laymen's” ascribing of individual-level concept to collective processes (J. C. Alexander, 2004, 2012). In this dissertation, I do not use the concept of trauma to shed light on collective memory overall. Instead, what I claim is that, in order to understand how the films discussed in this subchapter – *Tu (Here, 2003)*, *Projekcije (Projections, 2013)*, and *Kosac (The Reaper, 2014)* – respond to the dominant narrative, employing a concept of trauma is necessary, as it is the films themselves that treat the war as a kind of traumatic untold experience, a traumatic memory.

The understanding of how traumatic memory works in these films corresponds to the conceptualization of trauma offered by Mieke Bal (Bal, 1999). Bal asserts that collective

memory should be seen as personal memory that is explicated from an individual to another through mediation (language, writing etc.). In the process, the personal memory takes on a narrative form. Such memory is emotionally charged, performed and always the product of the present (Bal, 1999, p. viii). Traumatic memory differs in that it resists narrativization, and appears rather as “a drama that, although at some point it happened to [the subject], [the subject] is not able to master” (Bal, 1999, p. ix). Traumatic memories also lack the social component: they cannot be controlled by the subject possessing it, and thus cannot be told to another; for this reason, it cannot become a part of the collective memory either. To become (collective) memory, the traumatic act of the past needs to be made “narratable” (Bal, 1999, p. x).

Bal’s conceptualization of collective memory is outside of the scope of the concept employed in this dissertation: collective memory need not, as I argue in Chapter II, start out as personal memory. Yet her conceptualization of traumatic memory is useful because it corresponds with how the memory haunting characters is presented in the films. I argue that, by presenting characters who cannot speak about their experience or control how the memory of it appears to them, these films imply that they carry a trauma that has not yet been worked through into narrative, yet it needs to be. The characters’ traumatic experiences are all tied to the war – which thus becomes a repetitive individual trauma. By situating these characters within various versions of dissected post-war Croatian society, in which they act as representative types, this trauma is implied to be not just a personal silence, but a wider societal issue (rather than something that is treated as a psychological state of particular characters): the characters become a proxy for an unhealthy society’s dealing – or more specifically, the lack thereof – with the recent past. Traumatic flashbacks (sometimes seemingly permanent) are posited against the dominant narrative, and work as its silent rejections: as if to say that the “real” experience(s) of the war has yet to come out, be narrativized and collectively shared, meaning the narrative which has been produced thus far cannot be understood as the “proper”

war story, but instead as one that covers up and silences that which is still untold. It is this reading that is elaborated below.

There are three films discussed in this subsection, two of them made by the same director, Zrinko Ogresta.¹²⁸ They all take very different approaches to the war but have one common trait: what needs to be said – information that is crucial to understand what is going on in the film – remains untold, an unarticulated silence, usually presented through one character. The central idea is thus the impossibility to speak of one's experience and control one's relationship with that experience, and thus with the past. This idea appears always as just one of the films' stories, belonging to only one of the characters.

4.1.3.1 The film stories

In *Tu*, a plethora of different characters – some of whom have spent time on the military front together – try to survive in the post-war Zagreb, dealing with loneliness, end of marriage, crises of career, PTSD and the unprocessed legacy of the war during Christmas time. In *Projekcije*, a group of psychiatrists and psychologists¹²⁹ in training spend some hours (almost in real-time) bickering among themselves while waiting for the chair of their psychotherapy group, the foreign prof. Blau. When Blau finally arrives, he says nothing as the conflict continues, only to suffer a heart attack and die on the spot, leaving the characters without a leader and guidance. Finally, in *Kosac*, the lives of three groups of people connect over one night. Ivo, an elderly veteran who came out of prison after serving a sentence for rape, helps a woman whose car has died in the woods. Upon learning Ivo's story from a gas station salesman, her feelings turn from gratitude to fear, yet she decides to give him a chance and they form a bond – one that is quickly

¹²⁸ In 2016, Ogresta made another film – *S one strane (On the other side)* – that repeats the same pattern, yet it sadly came out too late to be included in this chapter.

¹²⁹ There are eight characters in the room: the narcissistic émigré actress Barbara (who arrives late, as usual), the authoritative psychiatrist Simona, the aggressive war veteran Bojan, the bourgeois Irena, the alternative-leaning Zdenka, the simple, slightly unrefined Alemka and her colleague, the gay, color-blind schoolteacher Robert, as well as the cheerful Slovene who is also the assistant to the group leader, Nataša. Two - Stevan, a participant from Serbia, and the professor himself - are missing.

interrupted when the local policemen harassing Ivo pay them a visit, which leads her to leave and Ivo to commit suicide. In the meantime, the gas station salesman attends his brother's party, where he spends time with a group of war veterans, one of whom doesn't speak. The youngest of the policemen struggles at home with his wife, who is tired of being a stay-at-home mom and would like to go back to work.

4.1.3.2 *The loud silence of unprocessed stories*

The three films differ significantly in stories, as well as the formal elements used to tell them. Two – *Tu* and *Kosac* – share a mosaic structure, in which the lives of seemingly unrelated characters are interconnected in the course of a day. In both films, however, this mosaic form more is telling of the films' conceptualization of the post-war period than of its relationship to narrating the war (as was the case in earlier subsections): the persistent dragging repetitiveness of life (*Tu*) and the unavoidable connections between individuals which we fail to recognize on a daily basis. In *Projekcije*, in which the group serves as a proxy for the nation, the unusual formal experiment in the film – almost all of the film is shot in characters' subjective frames – also emphasizes their interconnectedness/distance between characters at a particular moment. This visually deconstructs the idea of closeness and “sameness” between them, challenging the notion of the nation as a homogenous, closed unit. But it also provides a means of establishing – paradoxically – a kind of equality between characters in the room, which contradicts the self-perceived power dynamics between them: everyone in the room sees someone in the group as less powerful than themselves, their opinion less worthy, yet the subjective camera shots reveal them all to stand approximately at each other's eye-level, being equal. More importantly, this visual (eye-)levelling simultaneously destroys the self-perceived difference between them and prof. Blau. As a foreign observer and the group leader, Blau takes a double position of authority, which the group members embrace. Their bickering ends with his arrival; their monologues are (excluding rare moments of defiance) structured in a way that is assumed to be to his preference.

Characters project onto themselves what they think Blau's preference for their behavior would be, even as he remains silent. In the context of the film, Blau is the "West", whose authority is cynically questioned while he is away, yet followed diligently when he is present – and even in his absence, as an internalized assumption about what should be done (e.g. all characters remain waiting for Blau, although no instructions from him have been given).

The films do not – again unlike those in the earlier subsections – remediate familiar war imagery or related footage to anchor themselves within familiar stories. While *Tu* opens with scenes of wartime (see discussion below), those scenes do not evoke familiar media representations (e.g. Lederer's soldier-video; see section on *Crnci* above). *Projekcije* and *Kosac* do not include any remediation attempts at all; both are fully set in the present.

Finally, while these films do center around the character of the soldier – as the most important character of the war narrative – subverting the soldier character's role during the war is not their main dialogical response to the status of the soldier in the dominant narrative; instead, focus is moved from wartime to post-war soldier, the veteran. This does not mean the soldier-character is not partially questioned in the past as well. In *Kosac*, the soldier is implied to be a perpetrator of wartime rape – although this is never explicated, and the crime might also be unrelated to the war (a point that is left vague). *Tu*, on the other hand, opens with footage of soldiers playing cards, making fun of a disabled young man nearby, dreaming of going back home or just losing their temper over the situation they found themselves in. The heroism of the official soldier-image is here replaced with boredom, waiting and a touch of nationalism (Ustaša songs). At the same time, the film does keep one common element taken from the films from the 90's: soldiers are shot at but are not shooting (see Pavičić, 2011b), and are entirely passive. Not much is revealed about the war otherwise.¹³⁰ The film does not give the impression

¹³⁰ Passivity, however, reveals more than it might seem at first sight. The film does not idealize the soldiers: they are presented as a group of varied characters, ranging from kind (Karlo) to disheartened (Lala) to unrefined (the soldiers smoking, drinking and playing cards, making fun of Kavi). They are inactive, suffering the boredom and

of soldiers as heroic, but doesn't explicitly deny it; yet by depicting moments of boredom and banality, it takes away the dominant narrative's elevation of the war as in a sense permanent: the idea that all war moments were relevant, crucial, deciding, history-making. In the post-war period, these same men are then seen again, having become drug addicts, PTSD sufferers unadjusted to the everyday life, or – in the case of Lala, the wartime commander who is seen as the central character in my analysis – men who cannot process their experience of the war fully. The film thus adopts the complex post-war image of the soldier as someone who cannot fully integrate into society (or does so at the expense of repressing some of his experiences). Such depiction was already well established by the time the film came out. There was a shift in the media representation of the 'Homeland War' soldiers after the death of Tuđman and the change of government, one that wasn't followed by a change in collective memory: from focusing on the soldiers as wartime heroes to a more complex representation of post-war veterans as heroes, but also as a societal cause for concern (following a stream of PTSD-related suicides and killings), dangerous "ticking bombs," villains and sometimes schemers who profited by acquiring higher than earned ranks, or not having earned them at all (Car, 2009, pp. 184–194). The unauthorized publishing of the veterans' register in 2010, which raised some questions over who, and how, got the veteran status, contributed to this shift in representation. Yet while these new kinds of veteran stories did gain prominence, they didn't deeply challenge the war narrative itself: while they provided those who were already critical of the war an additional argument, these often-tragic stories were also assumed by the veterans themselves to deepen the dominant narrative, turning them into victims whose sacrifice and heroism were not fairly recognized post-war.¹³¹

ultimately fear that is being imposed on them from the outside. In this sense, the film provides a partial comment on the past itself. There is no doubt who the active perpetrator is (he is given away by the sound of the grenades).¹³¹ In this sense, the story is very much similar to the Vietnam veterans' story in the US, where the public representation ultimately shifted from courage to criticism and then to representing the soldiers as individual victims, misunderstood at home (see Andereg, 1991; Noreen, 2004). The difference is, of course, that Croatia effectively won the war – and also that the soldiers' heroism still remains the mainstream memory representation.

Tu represents veterans with much empathy. It emphasizes the out-of-the-ordinary situation of the conflict which negatively affects the soldiers, as well as the difficulty of continuing life after such experience. The non-accommodating post-war situation, which the film presents as bleak, results in a sense of time wasted: whatever the soldiers fought for has not, the impressions it, been achieved, but the years of their lives are irreversibly lost. The soldier is thus also seen as a victim, someone for whom the war meant a sense of loss. In *Projekcije*, the soldier is a frustrated individual who perpetually feels pressure to perform a certain way for the international community; this is all the film reveals of the character. In *Kosac*, finally, the veterans are again a plurality, and all victims to an extent. Some are self-victimized perpetrators: Ivo, whose (presumably) wartime rape is a self-inflicted trauma, and who has been (self-) ostracized from society. The other veterans are shown as equally without perspective as everyone else in the area, wasting their time at the local bar, revisiting stories. Finally, there is the unnamed figure of a veteran who is barely noticeable, someone who has lost the capacity to communicate with the environment and is permanently trapped inside his own head, reliant only on those who can partially relate to experience (fellow veterans). There is thus no single character of the veteran, and by extension, no single character of the soldier.

How then do these films reject the dominant narrative? In all three films, the war keeps reappearing as the unprocessed, traumatic experience that cannot be narrativized, but that holds the characters captive. Even the physical places (locations) in all films appear haunted by the war and the legacy of the 1990s, present as an underlying, silent background to all characters' lives. But the war's direct effect as an untold traumatic story is expressed through individual characters. These characters are all veterans: it is their war experience that they cannot tell, cannot narrativize and thus control – the first step to moving past it. All these repressed experiences keep arising to characters who live within spaces filled with the dominant narrative. Yet this narrative cannot capture their experience and is thus revealed as inadequate: the truly

relevant war stories, which stop people from living in the present, are ones that haven't yet been fully processed, and they are too complex for the simplistic memory version.

In *Tu*, this untold story is explicated primarily through the character of Lala, the former unit commander. Of all his men, Lala seems to be the best integrated: he has a family, a middle-class life. Yet he is unable to sleep, and – when confronted about this by his teenage son – incapable of articulating his own thoughts and experience that keeps him up at night. The war is permanently there, imprinted on his face and occupying his thoughts, but it cannot be put into words. The film underlines this by accompanying his insomnia with the tune of the national anthem: the glorious story of the homeland that the anthem articulates is in discrepancy with his own memory, as if these are two different stories. In the same manner, Lala's experience of the war cannot be incorporated into the existing narrative either. Words are not yet found by the character to express it and thus leave it behind.

In *Projekcije*, the unspeakable belongs to Bojan, the veteran who rejects the story he's been expected to tell about the war all along – yet is at a loss for words when needing to articulate his own. He is frustrated with the descriptors he feels have been given to him by the rest of the group, and specifically Blau as the outsider – a macho, an Ustaša, a defectologist with an “alcohol defect.” But he is also incapable of letting go of them and of finding his own descriptors, to articulate his own story: as he tries, he can do no more than break down in tears. At the same time, he cannot stop bringing up the war experience, the frustration of having to talk about the war constantly in the same manner, which appears as if it has been pre-narrativized by someone else. There is thus a paradox of the public sphere being saturated with stories of the war, while at the same time not capturing the war in a meaningful manner, one that is articulated also from the bottom-up. The words are not yet there.

Finally, in *Kosac*, the untold story is dealt with subtly. In fact, the understated tone of the whole film serves as an articulation of it: all characters move in a space that is filled with

the consequences of the war, creating a society still frozen in wartime, although the war is long over. The film depicts this most notably through the abandoned factory where Ivo now lives. The rooms in the factory reveal lipstick traces on old coffee mugs, dust covering papers – an empty place frozen in time. The war is permanently present, yet avoided; and even when it is told, it is in whispers, a story that is someone else's and not the speaker's. Ivo's story is the epitome of this: he lives with it in self-isolation and is constantly surrounded with everyone's renditions of it but his own; the story precedes him and defines him but is never told by him. It also haunts him, forcing him into exile (and eventually into suicide). An even more poignant untold story is that of the veteran at the local bar. He is – inarticulate, medicated and likely also under the influence of alcohol – clearly unable to tell it; he is barely able to communicate at all. Yet he also permanently carries it around. Both men's stories are central to the film. They are unable to escape them; moreover, their physical presence is a continuous reminder of the war for others around them. The two men are thus both moving memory signs, memory places: one of war crimes committed and repressed, only whispered about; the other of the war lived and untold, both moving within a space saturated with a narrative of celebration and heroism into which they simply don't fit.

To conclude, how do all these films stand on the question of narrative ownership? All the films focus on "Croatian" stories. This is most obvious in *Projekcije*, where the central theme of the film is precisely the collective Croatian experience – in contrast to 'the West', Slovenia, (absent) Serbia. In that particular film, the overlap between ethnic identity and experience of the war is explicit. In others, it is not thematized. Yet by not offering an own distinction of whom the narrative might belong to, all films seem to fall within the conventional thinking in which national identity is automatically also the determinant of one's war experience. There was, in other words, a "Croat" and a "Serb" experience of the war, and the films have no interest in critically reevaluating those categories.

4.1.4 The films that “play along”: Reviving the official narrative

Earlier sections could have easily given an impression that to complicate the narrative structure of a film or introduce the character of a kinder Serbian soldier would make the dialogue between film and dominant memory narrative into one of open criticism. This section refutes that assumption. It does so by looking at two films – *Zapamtite Vukovar* (*Remember Vukovar*, 2008) and *Broj 55* (*Number 55*, 2014) – that both reinforce the dominant narrative, entering an affirmative dialogue with the dominant narrative of the past. These films are interesting because they show how the dominant narrative remains stable over time: they both came out relatively recently, yet the story they tell of the war reflects hardly anything of the issues raised by films discussed in previous subsections. This is particularly true of *Broj 55*, which – apart from making the soldiers active characters rather than passive sufferers – repeats almost all points of the dominant narrative. One could claim this is a matter of genre: conventions require a particular setup and characters. Yet the reverse can also be pointed out: it is not genre conventions that shape the story, but the other way around. The film’s most remarkable feature is its bridging of the gap that was problematic for the 1990s Croatian cinema (see Pavičić, 2011): how to deal with the image of the country as both victim and victor (see on this Jović, 2017), both a passive sufferer and an active, heroic force that defeats a stronger enemy.

4.1.4.1 The stories

Zapamtite Vukovar is the story of the last days of the Croatian city of Vukovar before it was conquered by the JNA, paramilitary and rebel Serb troops in November 1991. To understand the relevance of the film, it is necessary to recall the role Vukovar plays in collective memory of the war. Hailed as the “hero city,” Vukovar has taken the spot of embodying the suffering of the country in collective memory, an image that has been supported through media, official commemorations and even fringe academia work (see, for example Jurčević, 2000; Propadalo, 2012; Živić, Špoljar Vržina, Cvikić, & Žebec Šilj, 2014; Živić, Špoljar Vržina, Lupis, & Cvikić,

2013). The focus has been primarily on collective victimization: the city as a whole was presented as the victim, often standing in for the country as a whole, and the rich religious symbolic related to the commemoration gave it a transcendent, martyr-like status (Kardov, 2006). While those killed in Vukovar (as well as the city's many refugees) take a special place in this narrative, they are observed primarily as symbols of national suffering: personal stories matter to the extent they fit the collective narrative. Filled with memorials that perpetuate re-living the past and division along ethnic lines (Clark, 2013), Vukovar has since the war become a place of contestation, in which versions of the past collide and minority issues are a frequent source of conflict. The fall of Vukovar is often presented as the most traumatic memory in the context of the 'Homeland War'.

If there was an individual human face that became the universal symbol of Vukovar in Croatia, however, it was Siniša Glavašević, the anchor of the city's radio station (Radio Vukovar) who reported from it until he was killed days after the siege. *Zapamtite Vukovar* tells the story of Glavašević and his radio crew, and through them, a story of the whole city as a martyr and hero. It shows in parallel the radio employees' encounters with the local rebel leaders, and the paramilitaries' and JNA's process of organizing mass executions on the site of the nearby Ovčara right after the city was put under their control, including evacuating the local hospital. In the film, a couple of radio employees manage to escape the city with the help of strangers (among them also an JNA soldier) to tell the story of Vukovar to those outside – but most, including Glavašević, are killed in mass executions.

Premiered in Pula at the national film festival, *Zapamtite Vukovar* is a retelling of the familiar Vukovar narrative. This perhaps helps explain why the film has received good audience reviews at the festival (4.47 out of 5), as it essentially repeated the familiar story to the audience. Following the premiere, however, the film was also the catalyst of a minor backlash over the nature of memory it evokes. How should one remember the city? *Zapamtite Vukovar* received

negative feedback from individuals who have survived the events it describes,¹³² as well as from members of Glavašević's family, who accused the director of "historical forgery" (Index.hr, 2008) and showing Glavašević and his crew as "lifeless, frightened and weak persons overshadowed by the unconvincingly demonized characters of Serb soldiers" as well as not being "true to the facts" (Glavašević, 2008). The comments were strange in their expectation: that a film about historical events should somehow be true to those events, and not an artistic interpretation. Moreover, criticism of the film for showing Glavašević and his crew as passive in the face of the siege received negative feedback also from some conservative portals, who accused the film of downplaying Croatian victory and "ruining Croats' morale and courage" (M.M.B., 2008).

Released in 2014 as part of a planned series of films about the 'Homeland War' produced by the national television, *Broj 55* – scripted and shot by a veteran – is a fictionalized account of the sighting mission in the village of Kusunje in September 1991 which turned into an ambush, resulting in torture and killing of the unit – which hid in the film's titular village house – by members of the JNA and rebel Serb troops. The film follows two small units given a task of patrolling the Kusunje area. As they move into the nearby village in an improvised combat vehicle, they fall into an enemy ambush. Outnumbered and under siege, they wait for backup which never arrives, and are defeated after a 24-hour struggle in which most are killed and the rest are captured and tortured by enemy soldiers. *Broj 55* rewrites the war story into an action film narrative, taking lessons from John Carpenter in how the enemy swarms *en masse* and zombie-like at the torn-down house (see e.g. Nikolić, 2014; Tomljanović, 2014); it was also inspired by Vietnam imagery (Milić cited in Globus, 2013). Overwhelmingly, the film was favorably received by the critics, frequently described as free from ideology, with only the rare exceptions noting that it was, in fact, "the return to the ideological logic of Croatian cinema in

¹³² Additional controversy concerned Hadžić's use of Alenka Mirković's book about her experience with Hrvatski Radio Vukovar without officially citing sources; on the book, see (Crnković, 2012).

the 1990s” (Radić, 2014a). It still didn’t go without a minor backlash: upon seeing it, several veterans’ associations objected to the film, arguing that it didn’t represent the war accurately: God and rosary ware, the argument went, not present enough in the film.

4.1.4.2 *Keeping the memory intact*

Both films present themselves as being inspired by true events, thus claiming a more direct connection to the past than any of the films discussed earlier. *Zapamtite Vukovar* takes this idea further, remediating historical footage from the siege of Vukovar, thus giving the impression to the viewer of having access to historical events. Apart from a few scenes designed as flashbacks (in faded tones), the story is told linearly. Archival footage is used to visualize the traumatic events of destruction and evacuation of the city (exchanges between characters are mostly shot inside or in front of single walls or in dark nature). Attention is also paid to details on the soldiers’ uniforms, to remind the viewer of the diversity of the threat. Yet this attempt at claiming authenticity in representation fails, likely due to production expenses: the film opens with a fictional news report by an imaginary TV station, GNN, during which an anchor speaks about the imminent fall of the city, accompanied by archival footage. The evocation of familiar imagery combined what looks like an amateur imitation inadvertently draws attention to the scenes’ constructedness – as does the overtly argumentative script (see below).

Broj 55 points to its own constructedness at the end, including the names and photos of men who died in the event the film dramatizes. The film also opens with the story’s ending, then reverts to explore how this ending came to be (although the viewer is not instantly made aware of the scene’s meaning).¹³³ This works – together with the genre coding of the film – to intensify the interest in the story (What happened here?). At the same time, by shaping the story

¹³³ The film opens with a shot of the camera moving backwards from the ruined house, slowly revealing the setting, the dead bodies and last of the living soldiers on the floor (accompanied by dramatic, pulsating music), only to reveal the enemy soldiers slowly entering by the dozens, shooting indiscriminately. As the camera pulls further back, it reveals the ruins of the house and the emptiness of the village. The film then cuts back in time and introduces the viewer to the characters.

through familiar genre codes and opening it with a moment of surprise that requires an explanation, the political content of the film becomes subdued: since action heroes are supposed to act in certain manners (e.g. brave, fearless, working together etc.), separating the genre codes from political ones becomes harder; and opening the film with a shot that points to its constructed nature (as well as using a color scheme that – with its washed-out blue and brown hues – gives the film a slightly processed feel) does recognize the artificiality of the story, but not to an extent that would overwrite the attractive familiarity of the narrative it utilizes.

In terms of characters, *Broj 55* shows more connection to the dominant narrative – reinforcing it almost in full – than *Zapamtite Vukovar*, which introduces some variation to the story. The latter film, for one, does not deal with soldier characters on the Croatian side at all. Instead, the hero-victim characters are here the radio anchors. They embody both heroism and passivity, the two tenets of representation of characters in the official narrative: they stay in Vukovar throughout, accept their fates calmly, do not snitch on their colleagues; yet they also do not actively fight their destiny: they surrender, embodying the victimhood of the city as a whole. The victimhood is emphasized also through other characters, e.g. wounded men from the hospital taken for execution, men already brought to Ovčara. None of these characters show any individual traits, but represent parts of the collective suffering body.

Most of the dialogues between Croat and Serb characters in *Zapamtite Vukovar* are organized as a discursive retracing of the fall of the city, having characters throw incriminating sentences at each other. They come from different positions of power: a radio journalist vs. JNA military officer, etc.; yet the Croat characters always stay truthful to their version of the story, reinforcing the heroism in face of the stronger (more powerful, armed, etc.) enemy. Themes spanning from Yugoslavia to revisionist history are discussed, with Serb stories revealed as unconvincing propaganda, easily dismantled by the responses of Croat counterparts. Finally, there is the familiar narrative of the outnumbered heroes losing the battle against a

much stronger enemy. In the case of Vukovar, the difficulty with evaluating this part of the narrative is that the city's defending forces eventually did fall under the pressure of a significantly stronger offensive; moreover, the narrative of Vukovar as a hero-city present in the film through Glavašević's original radio broadcast messages was not an *a posteriori* explanation constructed to create memory, but a specific Vukovar narrative that got integrated into the official narrative, after having been developed bottom-up. But as already noted, it is the film's collectivization of tragedy and victimhood that is an interpretation – rather than a repetition – of the events, familiar from the dominant memory narrative. *Zapamtite Vukovar* does make two subversions to the dominant narrative: criticizing the political leadership over the fall of Vukovar and balancing the enemy image by offering a few Serb characters who are not inherently evil – a drafted young soldier, an old local man who is executed for helping his neighbors. While the latter intervention does expand slightly the narrative ownership (see below), it changes little in term of the narrative's dominant elements.

Broj 55 reinforce the dominant narrative even more than *Zapamtite Vukovar*: the film's dialogical strategy is to recognize and reinforce its main tenets. In the process, the film manages to strike a balance between the two narrative elements that do not sit together comfortably: the passivity of victimhood and the heroism of the soldier. In the film, the soldiers are allowed to be active: much of the film consists in the ambushed unit trying to keep the enemy away, while the rest is filled with the special police and headquarters' efforts to assist them; they are even seen shooting and killing enemy soldiers. But the asymmetry of power is quickly made clear: as opposed to the Serb rebels assisted by JNA, many of the men are unarmed; their armoured vehicle is an improvisation which causes laughter; by establishing their position as the ambushed, brave patrol, as well as showing in great detail their their brave (and ultimately unsuccessful) attempts at defending themselves – as well as hinting at the torture that followed – the defensive, self-sacrificing position of the characters is reaffirmed. The status of the victim

is additionally underlined through the character of one of the soldiers, Kruno, a young man who is wounded early on and the last one to die. In one of the film's final scenes, his limping exit out of the destroyed house is followed by an execution-style close-up shooting. The implication is that his battle was one of a bare-handed, wounded character against a row of heavily armed men: a metaphor for the wounded country still striking back, going down heroically.

All the Croat characters are in some sense model soldiers: courageous, dedicated, loyal to the collective and team players without ever raising a second thought. Everything they do is done with meticulousness and care (even the dead are transferred carefully, and no wounded men are left behind). There is joking and friendly rivalry among the men, but everyone sacrifices themselves without asking, eagerly rushes into battle, and the strategy of defending the house is collaborative. Rare dissent it is sorted out in a courageous manner, and acts of mutual care are abundant.¹³⁴ It is ultimately the solidarity that cost the men their lives: the refusal to leave the wounded meant they all died in the house or were captured. But their defeat is shown to be only temporary: By holding on to their positions, they deterred a larger attack on other fronts. The sacrifice was thus meaningful, and a small step on the way to the final victory and Croatia's independence.

The soldiers in *Broj 55* are also allowed moments of vulnerability, which emphasize the difficulty of the situation for them (they are all inexperienced young men thrown into battle), but also the collective national sacrifice: the war is hard on individuals; but more so, it is hard on the nation's men (the film has no female characters). This emphasis on collectivity is perhaps best seen in how the film treats its characters. For a film that juggles an impressive ensemble cast, there is great attention paid to establishing their individuality. Names are given, characters sketched, and time dedicated to give each a specific character: only a couple of the soldiers in

¹³⁴ An example of this is the scene in which, upon facing a retreat, one of the characters decides he is "not retreating, so help me God", only for an exchange of ammunition and approval – and the gifting of a helmet, just in case - to follow. Radić (Radić, 2014a) notes a similarity between Yugoslav Partisan films and *Broj 55* when it comes to characters' motivations and actions in solidarity.

the film remain anonymous, serving to fill the more dynamic action scenes. But in action-filled scenes, this insistence of characterization gets lost: the characters are observed as a single entity with a mission. The insistence on establishing individuality, however, familiarizes the face of the nation. These are “our boys”: something tangible that can be known and related to¹³⁵.

In contrast, the enemy characters (the Serb rebel soldiers and JNA members) are represented in line with their 1990’s representation: stereotypical JNA uniforms, bearded Četniks, repeating the visual tropes of the 1990s.¹³⁶ They are, unlike their Croat counterparts (young, handsome, with neat haircuts and details sticking under military clothes), uniformly unpleasant to look at. They are also uniformly vile: crawling out of everywhere like zombies, a uniform mass that lacks any individuality. They are many, and equipped with enough ammunition to shoot almost constantly (reaffirming the idea of a significantly stronger enemy). At the same time, the enemy is also made cowardly and ridiculous. In one scene, the interruption of the radio connection reveals enemy soldiers complaining to superiors that they had been attacked by a tank, when in fact it was the improvised armored vehicle;¹³⁷ in another, they mistake the sighting mission for a “great Ustaša attack”, mobilizing all their men in response.

There are two ways in which the two films align. One is their subtle attempt at subversion of the dominant narrative, notable for the fact that it is less a critique of it, and more an insistence for a narrative that is even more patriotic: in both films, it is indicated that the loss (the fall of Vukovar, the killing of the unit) is in part due to the military command structures consciously not acting to assist the heroes on the ground. This affirms the heroic narrative even

¹³⁵ The tie between the individual men and the nation is made also through unusual details, e.g. throwing a coat-of-arms badge as a sign of recognition between men.

¹³⁶ E.g. through the shot of a leg in black shoes and ribbed socks pulled up over the trousers – which is meant to visually signal a lack of taste stereotypically tied to the more rural origins – as opposed to the Ray Bans and mostly urban décor on the Croatian soldiers.

¹³⁷ In contrast to this, the heroism is implied to run across generations among the Croatian soldiers, through a scene in which the wounded Kruno takes out an old gun from his bag – said to be given to him by his grandfather. It is not revealed where the grandfather has fought, but the scene evokes not only generational courage, but the idea that the battle for independence has been fought for a long time now – another tenet of the official narrative, which sees the war as paradoxically both the ultimate event and the continuation of a long-term struggle.

in spite of potential responsibilities. The other is their narrative ownership: both films divide their characters explicitly on ethnic basis and offer “Croat” narratives. *Zapamtite Vukovar* does leave space for inclusion of certain Serb characters among “us”; yet this space of negotiating who the “good Serbs” (Radić, 2014b) are has always been more or less present (see Đurić & Zorić, 2009); and its arbitrariness means it is also easy to reverse. In *Broj 55*, the question of who is the enemy, what defines him, is never even raised, while “our” side is clearly defined through frequent brief appearances of the Croatian checkered coat of arms.

In conclusion, this chapter looked at how films that enter into direct dialogue with the dominant narrative of the war in Croatia process and react to that narrative. Four different subgroups were identified based on how the films enter into dialogue with. The first group is found to treat the dominant narrative as deceitful because it omits or distorts a crucial piece of information that would change it radically. This is done predominantly through breaking the linearity of the plot to examine the stories that lie beneath what they appear on the surface, as well as through rethinking the main characters of their stories vs. those of the official narrative. Despite rejecting its totality, the films differ in the extent to which they still endorse elements of the official narrative – a fact that shows no linear pattern through time. The second group of films, both made by Vinko Brešan, are observed as attempts to claim the dominant narrative deceitful because it is given out as one single truth; yet while attempting to dismantle such monologic singularity through introduction of multiple characters, and thus languages and perspectives (which is best set out when measuring the film against the ideal of Bakhtinian polyphony), ultimately these films fail because the discrepancy remains between the desire to let various characters and perspective “battle out” differences and the focus on still ultimately telling a singular story throughout the film. The films in the third group enter a dialogue through silence with the dominant narrative, rejecting its monopoly through an assertion that the war is, rather

than a simple narrative of victory, a still untold, unprocessed trauma for characters who serve as proxies for the Croatian society, one yet to be narrativized. What needs to be said has not, these films imply, been properly articulated yet. Finally, the last group of films reveal themselves as mostly apologetic of the official discourse, presenting it as true, if in need of correction here and there.

As part of the films' dialogical strategies to the dominant narrative concerning the war, narrative ownership of the discourse about the war that the films present was also considered. Even with all the criticism directed at the dominant discourse, most films were found to be limited in terms of narrative ownership: the stories it tells were predominantly "Croatian": they spoke to a preconceived group about their specific war experience, even if they rarely specified whether this group is ethnicity-based, civic or otherwise. The next chapter, concerning films that engage less directly with the narrative in a dialogical sense, but rather try to push aside the past for the sake of the present, shall demonstrate that a different configuration concerning narrative ownership is very much possible – even if it comes at a price concerning the films' relationship to important topics left out of the official narrative, with the issue of war crimes being perhaps the most pressing.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: FILMS BYPASSING THE PAST

In Chapter IV, I explored films that dialogically respond to the dominant narrative, with various intentions (to support, challenge or reject it) and through various strategies. This included exploring narrative ownership strategies in these films, which showed that, while they actively process and respond to the dominant narrative, the analyzed films mostly held onto the simple “us-them” distinction, assuming that the stories they tell are “Croatian” stories (speaking also to Croat audiences about “our” war crimes, exaggerations or successes) which also belonged to Croatian viewers as natural recipients. It was not always clear what the dividing line is: while in some films ethnicity determined one’s side in the war, others recognized that ethnicity in itself was not automatically what made one into an enemy or determined the side of the conflict they were fighting for – if they were fighting at all. But the boundary is still broadly set along those lines, and characters who don’t subscribe to it are exceptions; ultimately, the films do not speak for them or to them – but *about* them to the audiences on the “Croatian” side. When film stories involved Serb characters, these characters served mostly as catalysts and plot points for a ‘Croatian’ story: invisible Serbian victims to speak about “our” crimes, rare exceptions that confirm the rule.

Films discussed in this chapter – and there are only two, *Dva igrača s klupe* (*Two Players from the Bench*, Dejan Šorak, 2005) and *72 dana* (*72 Days*, Danilo Šerbedžija, 2010) – exist in a different kind of dialogue with the dominant narrative. Instead of focusing primarily on deconstructing it and revealing it as fraudulent, incomplete or silencing the yet-untold, these films shift their focus, bypassing the dominant narrative and offering a glance into the present instead. The meaning in these films, however, is understandable precisely because of the existence of the dominant narrative: if they need no more than a few one-liners to get their point across, it is because audiences are familiar with the narrative these films are responding to.

As I argue below, these films assume the existence of a dominant narrative and enter a dialogue with certain of its tenets - just enough to destabilize it and move the focus from the most prominent points of interpreting the present to building a stable ground for looking ahead. In the process, they depoliticize the story of the war. By depoliticization, what I mean is that in both these films, the agency behind the war seems to lie somewhere else other than with the characters; the war was someone else's plot, the men depicted in the film simply powerless characters in it. The phenomenon is not new in the so-called Balkan cinemas. As Iordanova puts it in her own analysis, in cinemas of the region, "history is treated as something to endure, to live through, a process where one does not have agency but is subjected to the power of external forces. Someone else ultimately decides your present and future." (Iordanova, 2007, p. 22). This – in the case of contemporary Croatian film – allows the characters to search for a common ground outside of the war itself, and to redefine the war retroactively from that common ground. But it also means that these films do not ask "hard" questions related to contested topics: issues of war crimes or reasons for the war are at best hinted at, and the same goes for the sense of historical importance that is inherent to the dominant narrative. What is offered instead is a version of post-war reality that gently undermines the 'Homeland War' as the crucial event in the national story, by opening it up to its own implicit "other." By expanding the ownership of the war story to characters of Serb ethnicity and making them characters of equal standing, portrayed as being "just like us," these films pave the way for a version of reconciliation that glosses over the past for the sake of a stable, settled present. In a Bakhtinian interpretation, these films orchestrate a different set of discourses in relation to a theme (Stam, 1991, p. 253) than films discussed in Chapter IV. What these films then "do" for memory is also different than the films in the previous chapter: not an exploration of the recent past as ground for its thorough rethinking, but an attempt to bridge (bypass) the "us-them" divide through bridging the pre-war and post-war time, based primarily on forgetting the difficult

questions in the process. Both films shift the focus from the level of national, collective discourse (in which the nation is represented through proxies: the brave soldier, the courageous suffering mother etc.) to the level of individual stories and relations between individuals: as if the political can only properly be re-thought if it is depoliticized, brought to a different level.

The difference in strategy employed in these films with regard to narrating the past can be seen already on the basic formal level. For one, there are no attempts to play with the narrative structure: the two films share a linear narration, there are no flashbacks to the war period. Rather, the dialogicality works here through literal dialogue: brief exchanges that bring into question specific elements of the dominant narrative, in an attempt to make it porous enough to open up space for a change in narrative ownership. To establish the possibility for living together post-war, it is necessary to show that, whatever the official discourse was or is, in retrospect, it cannot cover the full experience of the war that lies “below” the level of top-down storytelling. For people without power, that story wasn’t what happened to them, the films imply, but what they were told to think and say by those who held the power.

Yet the strategy both films take also is self-limiting in terms of dealing with the past. Through their levels of dialogicality – which includes not only a dialogue with the narrative of the past, but also national stereotypes and film history, all completed with elements of the carnivalesque (see below) – these films simultaneously bring their political agenda to the fore and push it aside, limiting their own memory-making potential. The argument here is not that genre conventions, intertextuality or humor are unusable when it comes to rethinking the past (Chapter IV showed this not to be the case; see discussion on *Broj 55*), or that realism has an a priori advantage when it comes to a film’s memory-making potential. What I argue instead is that dialogue and humor are tools that can be manipulated in various ways and for various purposes; in the case of these films, by overplaying the variety of elements, they take the focus away from their own potential relevance in terms of memory-making. These filmic texts work

as if they permanently put their own position under question: as if to speak of a possibility of connecting between Serb and Croat characters post-war is in itself so problematic, there is a necessity to simultaneously argue for it and filter this message through as many layers of disguise as possible. This filtering becomes the most revealing element of the dialogue between the films and the dominant narrative, implying that memory requires more from contrarian texts than they are willing to admit: a permanent balancing act, an apologetic demeanor, a constant striving to not say too much. Before I move on to summarizing the films and analyzing what they “do” in terms of memory narrative, I discuss briefly why I believe this is so.

To understand this, it is worthy looking back at the memory literature, what it implies, and what it can tell us about film. I take inspiration from Strausz, who in his work on Romanian cinema, notes that memory literature tends to tell us that “social reality is not invariable; rather we can discern various, contradictory realities” (Strausz, 2017, p. 19) – a point along the lines of my own discussions about the Bakhtinian conceptualization of language (see Chapter IV); the goal of those looking into the relationship between art and memory thus “should not be the articulation of any objectively given notion of social reality; rather it should be how, in a given social setting, these statements are articulated, and what their form can tell us about present social conditions” (Strausz, 2017, p. 19). This dissertation started from the assumption that the present political and cultural memory are dominated by the official narrative template (the elements of which, when used for analyzing dialogical relations, I refer to as the dominant narrative). In consequence, all meaningful reactions to the war – including films – are inevitably tied to it and exist in a process of open or hidden dialogue with it (see Chapter II and III). There is no linear timeline or simple logic to this dialogue. This means that new information – including that from sources relevant for political memory, such as the ICTY – makes only incremental changes in the narrative scheme itself, often causing a backlash (see Ristić, 2014; Chapter III). There is also no implied synchronicity between the passing of time and linear

“improvement” in the official narrative in terms of acknowledging its own limits, difficulties and contradictions. This latter fact is also reflected in cinema. Facts enter in and out of films in no clear time intervals; celebrating and criticizing the official narrative comes in no clear patterns. For instance, although opening the topic of domestic war crimes with *Svjedoci* did perhaps make it easier to fully engage with the topic in *Crnci*, this didn’t preempt the glorifying narrative of *Broj 55*.

It could be concluded that it need not, either; that it is acceptable to make films both about the war crimes and about the heroism of Croatian soldiers, as both of these (and others) are “contradicting realities.” This t, however, rejects such a conclusion precisely because of the monologic nature of the dominant narrative, its closedness to dialogical exploration of facts and truths. If films are seen as producing narratives of the past, and they can “reflect and keep in circulation values and behaviours associated with a particular nation” (Williams, 2002, p. 8), then this is grounds enough to take them seriously as potential memory narratives. Supporting a narrative that presents itself monologically as true means excluding additions and amendments, closing the dialogue rather than opening it. In case of *Broj 55*, insisting on affirming a purely heroic narrative in a situation in which everything else gets proclaimed as false because it cannot be incorporated into it (e.g. the enemy was demon-like and driven by hatred of all things Croatian, rather than a combination of those who enjoyed inflicting pain in the war and those drafted against their will) is thus participation in the extension of monologism, rather than a contribution to a healthy plurality of memory stories (which is unavoidable; see for example Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, 2000). Thus, when films invite the viewer to rethink the war, failing to explicate this rethinking becomes a lost opportunity – even if it is an opportunity lost to intertextual dialogue with other texts (Stam, 2000a).

5.1 Resisting the hatred

5.1.1 The film stories

Dva igrača s klupe tells a story of Ante, a Croatian veteran from Dalmatinska zagora, and Duško, a Serb veteran living in Banja Luka. Both are asked by Antiša, an unspecified state security official, to testify in front of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as two military men whom they resemble (Joso Udlaga and Mato Bugić). This should help the Croatian state in getting the ICTY to drop its indictment against general Skoko, a fugitive celebrated as a war hero. The men, initially reluctant to impersonate someone of a different – “enemy” – nationality, eventually agree in exchange for a hefty monetary reward. Upon their testimony, it is revealed that the ICTY has also indicted the real Joso and Mato for war crimes. The characters agree to keep their newly adopted identities and plead guilty of the crimes, if their family members are again paid out 200,000 Euros.

In *72 dana*, two generations of men of the Serbian family Paripović – the aggressive Mane; his timid, alcohol-loving brother Joja; Joja’s son Brane; and Mane’s son Todor – live in a village in present-day, post-war Lika. Their first neighbor is a Croat, Mile, who is friends with the family. Paripovići live off of collecting the pension of their old aunt’s deceased husband, former chef in the American army. Brane, young and annoyed by the tyrannical Mane, dreams of leaving the village with his girlfriend Liča. When the aunt dies suddenly, the men – unwilling to find employment – decide to steal an old woman from the local pensioners’ home and get her to pose as their aunt so the pensions would keep coming. But tensions over the plan escalate, exacerbated by the old woman’s refusal to play her role as expected. The ensuing crisis results in Mane’s attempt to flee the village, taking everyone’s money. He lands on a landmine – one that he himself hid earlier – and is killed. Mane’s family, now free from his controlling power, continue the same pension-collecting scheme, with Brane taking over as the head of the family.

5.1.2 Unsettling the dominant narrative

As was the case with films discussed in the earlier chapter, the two films discussed here are in fact very different, in both content and form, themes and style. *Dva igrača s klupe* offers a critique of the way contemporary Croatian society and political structures handle the heritage of the past. The film adopts a conventional populist narrative¹³⁸ about the winners and losers of the process of history: the elites manipulating the masses for their own gain. This critique has been frequently articulated in Croatian public opinion¹³⁹; yet it is not particularly interesting in the context of this thesis. But in order to establish its narrative of ordinary men across warring sides being manipulated in a political game, the film needs to establish a connection between ordinary soldiers on both sides. In doing so, it unsettles the “us-them” categories – both for the characters and for the viewer. At the same time, the issues raised between the characters – which concern mostly their personal experiences with the war – are narrow, and all the possibly controversial questions about the war are bypassed.

72 dana is different. The film, shot in the director’s father’s home village (Ožegović, 2010), reflects the fact that, even after the dissolution of Krajina, there are still plenty of Serb citizens in that part of the country (Šerbedžija, as told to Đuran, 2011), and their everyday life goes on – yet they are not represented anywhere in the media. The film’s story portrays a humorous version of that life. It also seems to imply that the war can be bypassed by ordinary people because the way of life and tenets of human communication and relationships are stronger than the narratives of hatred imposed top-down. But here, the connections do not need to be created anew: they are presented as something that is already there and has been there all along. The characters do not buy the dominant narrative because they have lived an alternative to it together: it is only the viewer who needs this deconstruction.

¹³⁸ For my understanding of populism, see footnote 109, Chapter IV.

¹³⁹ It can also be connected to the increasing prominence of political parties that position themselves not on the left or right, but outside the regime. While scholarly work on this phenomenon in Croatia is still scarce, it is a thesis that has circulated in opinion pieces; see for example Mihaljević, 2017.

While different, the films share a number of similarities. Both are comedies set in the present-day environment. And they both rely heavily on intertextual cues in their storytelling. In *Dva igrača s klupe*, this strategy relies on playing into stereotypes, as well as some genre conventions. In *72 dana*, the film employs a heavily citational structure (see below), emphasizing the distance between the diegetic, narrative-created world of the film and the extradiegetic world of political narratives, connecting ultimately more to the filmic tradition than political discourse. As a consequence, both films appear shielded from being perceived as overtly political – which takes away from the potential impact of their critique.

The films achieve their critique of the dominant narrative dialogically in both a literal and Bakhtinian sense: through dialogue between characters which serves as a dialogical response to the elements of the dominant narrative. Ante and Duško have experienced the same events from different warring sides. As the characters re-tell them, what is revealed is that the narrative of the war is not one given, but a matter of interpretation, one that relies on the subject's own positioning, experience and embeddedness (or lack thereof) into the dominant national narrative¹⁴⁰ - but also other competing narratives, when one is exposed to them. General Skoko, a hero in Ante's memory, is thus a villain in Duško's, having contributed to his brother's death. What Duško remembers as retribution for this act is a painful memory for Ante: his 16-year old nephew was killed in the counteroffensive. The film supports taking the time and engaging in dialogue: the character who is listening always takes a slight pause, as if to process and incorporate the uncomfortable experience of the speaker.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ The film thus offers subtle commentary on the memory process itself, acknowledging that personal, individual memories are much more than simply lived experience.

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, the film never takes a moment to properly consider the impact the men's experience with Skoko's protectors has – if it has any at all – on their (and particularly Ante's) narrative of him. This could be an omission; yet it is proposed here to read it as a part of the film's message: the heroic narrative is so embedded and normalized in society, that even those elements that challenge it very tangibly (and in Ante's case, he physically experiences the scam that is Skoko's 'defense') go unprocessed.

One thing that is slightly ambiguous about *Dva igrača s klupe* is Duško's exact positioning: where is he from? Was he a part of a rebel Serb unit, the JNA or was drafted and sent from Bosnia? In *72 dana*, no such ambiguity exists: two men from the same location, but of different ethnic groups remind each other of the discrepancy in their memories of the war, which again correlate to the key themes in the dominant narrative. The discrepancies, however, come mostly from the instability of personal memories and refusal to publicly admit not fulfilling the dominant narrative (or rather narratives, as Mane comes with a narrative of his own). Declarations of own heroism, as well as acting according to the official (Croatian) version of what had happened are briskly dismantled in straightforward exchanges. Mane never participated in the war (thus not all local Serbs are "the enemy"); he was also protected by Mile, whose own behavior juxtaposes national loyalty to friendship. This dialogue between the film and the official narrative continues through the film's visual elements: Mile's heroic soldier boasting dissipates in a scene where, as he and Mane stand with guns pointing at each other, loud slamming of the car hood causes him to duck, as if hiding from an imaginary gunshot. His national décor (emblem on the hat, military uniform) is overridden by the information given about his behavior in the war. The film thus reveals that a myriad bottom-up, nuanced personal narratives of the war are possible which include "both sides", and which cannot be subsumed into the dominant narrative without it fully changing.

Both films also do something else in the process: break down the characters of the soldier and enemy. Rather than the stereotypical image of the enemy, the Serb fighter in *Dva igrača s klupe* becomes almost indistinguishable from his Croatian counterpart. His actions during the war were not driven by clear ideology or historical hatred, but by the work of higher (political) powers: he was drafted. And while his memory of the war includes revenge to a Croat unit, this is spoken of in an almost childish, competitive sense (they did it to us – we had our revenge) rather than arising out of any particular value-set. The character of Duško is also far

removed from the conventional depiction of Serb characters in the media (see Chapter III). Duško is tidily, if unstylishly dressed. He is physically unthreatening, his voice is non-aggressive, and his demeanor, including the clumsiness and naiveté, almost endearing, especially when contrasted to the more stereotypically masculine Ante.¹⁴² Finally, his complicated family background – his wife, with whom he has a young daughter, is having an affair with his best man, a policeman – adds an additional meaning to his position (he is being abused by the holders of power); but it also gives him a context, showing him as a caring father and a victim of external circumstances he cannot control. At the same time, Ante shows none of the traits of the hero-soldier of the 90s: he embodies neither the trope of the young, appealing soldier character, nor is he presented as a model warrior. In many ways, Duško is a more likeable character: neater, kinder, less prejudiced. The soldier is here not explicitly denied his heroism. Rather, the question is pushed aside, to focus instead on his naivety: he believed the sacrifice was all worth it, but maybe it really wasn't, and perhaps it is also partly his fault. Maybe he was a hero, but for what?

In *72 dana*, as was pointed out earlier, both the heroism of the soldier and the tie between ethnicity and animosity are ironized¹⁴³ and rejected.

5.1.3 Narrative ownership

The separation of ethnicity and character traits allows both films to expand the narrative ownership, for the purpose of normalizing the present. In *Dva igrača s klupe*, this is part of establishing a new “us-them” alliance: as the film introduces the viewer to both Duško and Ante in parallel, the story of the ‘Homeland War’ becomes a story that is *theirs* equally. *72 dana* pushes the boundary even further. The film normalizes the expansion of ownership of the

¹⁴² In a subplot involving a Ukrainian prostitute, Ante is also revealed to surpass his stereotypical traits, showing both care and tenderness. The subplot, however, relies on a stereotype of Ukraine, which allows the viewer to position him or herself as still more stable and better off than ‘those in the East’—not unlike what Bakić-Hayden has explored in terms of nesting Orientalisms (Bakić-Hayden, 1995, 2006).

¹⁴³ The film seems at times to ironize its own irony, for example in the depiction of Mane's exterior, which could almost pass for the stereotypical depiction of the enemy.

narrative by focusing on a Serb family in Croatia. To ask whom the war story belongs to is, in this context, a redundant question: it clearly belongs to those who experienced it, and their experience is not predetermined by their ethnicity. In *Dva igrača s klupe*, ethnicity of the characters is placed in focus so it can be bypassed. *72 dana* downplays the relevance of ethnicity altogether, which is a non-defining factor for the characters. All characters co-exist in the village among ruins, both physical and metaphorical.¹⁴⁴ They bicker over the war but assist each other without any differentiation; the roles they fulfill are independent of their ethnicity; i.e. the police officer, played by the late Serbian actor Nebojša Glogovac, could be either a Croat or a Serb, but is primarily a comically incompetent policeman. The exception to this avoidance of emphasizing ethnicity are the rare scenes that make direct references to the war, e.g. Mane's observation that he was not chased from the village by the Croatian army, but also not by Serb forces. He clearly separates himself from the acts committed in the name of ethnic groups – both “his” and “other”. The characters refuse to take on the roles they are expected to play under the official narrative: the Serb rebel; the Croat hero; the insurmountable hatred.

So far, I have explored how both films offer a creative, open rethinking of the war, countering the dominant narrative. In the remainder of this subchapter, I explore further a spark of resistance they both offer to not just the dominant narrative, but top-down politics in general, as well as the self-defeating citational strategies which mute their political message.

5.1.4 Resistance through the carnivalesque

As was mentioned earlier, both films discussed here are comedies. They employ humor in dealing with the societal issues they thematize. In both films, the humorous, comedic elements become a kind of political act, and one that is broader than just a critique of the war narrative. It is not only that the characters occasionally defy expectations with regard to their relationship

¹⁴⁴ The war is thus an overarching architectural presence in the film. Set in Lika, a region that was heavily impacted by the conflict (and was formerly a part of Republika Srpska), the film makes the setting look as if the war had just ended: houses are still being rebuilt. Particularly striking is the imagery of the local bar that looks like it was shelled just yesterday.

to the past and the “other”: they also express their resistance on a more abstract level, by tying moments of political defiance to a broader rejection of societal norms of everyday behavior. In the context of the film, this works on two levels: scenes draw both on the stereotypes of behavior as well as harness them within the scope of what, in Bakhtinian terms, could be labeled *carnavalesque*. To understand the concept, it is here worth citing Bakhtin extensively:

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it - that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people...People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square... Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123)

Carnival is a space of unification, contact, and blasphemous language. There is a positivity to the carnival (Kosmidou, 2013). Bakhtin elaborates on the role and use of carnival in literature, most notably through Menippean satire and its embeddedness in works of writers like Dostoevsky and Rabelais. The two films discussed here are not Menippean satires by genre. Rather, they take on the spirit of carnivalesque and several of its elements: the idea that one can overturn discursive hierarchies through subverting them in a process that, through humor, liberates those captured by them. The moments of anarchy oppose the dominant political discourse. Laughter here is “reduced” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 164): laughing tones are occasional, not permanent. Yet in terms of speaking of the ‘Homeland War’, it opens a space to escape the imposed seriousness, almost piety with which the war is usually approached.

Duško and Ante are equally stripped of their freedom. They choose to keep that equality even as freedom is regained (eventually slipping into same tracksuits, a visual demonstration of their equal standing against those in power). Mile and Mane are, on the other hand, equals from the start, existing in their own world of (citational, dialogical) profanity in the surreal

setting of imaginary Lika. Their setting is in itself a kind of reduced carnival stage, with constant drinking and gathering – a setting in which even the death of an old woman is treated as a comical, normal moment. The characters' situation is ridiculous, and there is also “something ridiculous” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 150) about the characters themselves: the two fools that are Ante and Duško; the cartoonish, exaggerated Paripović family and their entire village. This includes Mane's spitting before he combs his hair and the first aunt's penchant for rubber ducks; as well as the characters of the crippled local fool, the drunken postman and the dumb policeman.

Bakhtin identifies several representative expressions of the carnivalesque in literature (see Morson & Emerson, 1990; Stam, 1989). A few were mentioned above in context of the two films; further two - liberated feasting and song and dance - show how these films subvert the dominant politics through subverting behavioral norms. Both films integrate these elements as part of an attempt to liberate the characters from the narrative grip of the official politics and allow them to express their own normalcy, their own narrative. In *Dva igrača s klupe*, a poignant scene in which both men sing and move their bodies to the sound of folk music – generally frowned upon by higher classes as being of lesser value – shows them uniting and levelling with each other through a simple expressive gesture. Moreover, music is also used to emphasize not just Ante's roots and character, but the ways in which those in power try to establish a connection with those they're trying to exploit. In this way, *Dva igrača s klupe* also challenges the possibilities of the carnivalesque to truly make a difference outside of itself (cf. Stam, 1989, Chapter 4): the freedom it opens up can, as it demonstrates, also be co-opted. *72 dana* owes its title to the song of the same name sang in one of the scenes by the drunken Paripovići (discussed below). Branja plays guitar in a local band, which specializes in turning traditional verses into rebellious punk music. The music-filled scenes tie tradition and modernity, while allowing the characters to express both their love of the home region and frustration with its degradation – which the domestic viewership will recognize as in large part

due to the government's failure to establish a politics of return, revival and regeneration of the area. The comedic thus exposes another dimension of the political as failed, mocking it gently.

The role of feeding/feasting rituals is similarly transposed in both films. *Dva igrača s klupe* introduces the men over a serving of pork and beer. This kind of menu, which would traditionally be a part of major festivities, is here a playing field for the two men to start connecting. As Ante chops the meat and holds the beer for the handcuffed Duško, the two slowly overcome the animosity imposed on them by the official narrative. The pork head adds a touch of grotesque that reaffirms the carnivalesque setting. Bonding between Ante and his newly found Ukrainian interest, Stela, also happens over leftover meat.¹⁴⁵ In *72 dana*, shots of rakija shared with the postman precede the ritual of receiving the pension; a drunken evening of singing will yield the idea of replacing the old woman for another. The family's rejection of societal norms and power hierarchies is encouraged by a heavy consumption of alcohol, where indulgence leads to loss of care for the order of the world. They are willfully cheating on the system that is also, by keeping the town forgotten and filled with actual and metaphorical shelling holes, cheating on them, imposing a fake glorious narrative of the war. In Bakhtin's terminology, they truly reveal themselves (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 163) in this carnivalized setting, raging against the reality they are a part of.

There is one crucial difference between the two films. *72 dana* seemingly ends in an embrace of craziness: everything remains as crazy and defiant as it was. *Dva igrača s klupe* ends in giving up on that craziness: the characters agree to the hierarchy they've dismantled for the viewer; subtle signs that the carnivalesque freedom might win over the hierarchical structures give in to the characters' decision to play along with the official narrative, even if they know – having participated in falsifying it – that it must, at least to an extent, be a lie.

¹⁴⁵ It is of note that there is also an outburst of free sexuality between Stela and Ante, both actual (their first encounter begins as a sexual act) and implicit (food as the gateway to sexual pleasure). However, this is only partially carnivalesque, as the drive of the sexual act is Stela's sense of duty to perform, as a sex worker – even if Ante is not a client.

5.2 Self-defeating strategies of resistance

I have by now established that the films in this chapter, while not overtly critical to the dominant narrative, do have something to say about it. Yet while both films offer a meaningful expansion of narrative ownership, they both also subvert their own critical message. In both films, their extensive use of filmic citations and other references frequently works to both send their message and make it less impactful at the same time. Moreover, the depoliticization in both films leaves their dialogue with the dominant narrative ambiguous.

Dva igrača s klupe offers a paradox. The film draws on the standard tropes and prejudices that are tied to the area Ante originates from; at the same time, it refuses to position itself in real physical space. Its topography is rarely mentioned and mostly sounds invented and overplayed for comedic effect. Even Zagora, a physical location that had been severely affected by the war, is here an imaginary place related to an actual, physical location only through stereotypes. It might not be Zagora at all. The meta-filmic play in place further emphasizes this effect. The film's opening scene serves as an illustration. *Dva igrača s klupe* opens with a scene channeling one of the most popular good vs. evil genres, namely western. As the credits roll, the camera takes a stroll over an unidentified place: from the mountains slowly to the half-empty settled landscapes, zooming in to finally land at the local pub, where men – accompanied by the sounds of traditional singing – are playing cards and drinking. A car enters the scene: black, expensive, with Zagreb license plates. A silent man emerges from it: the new guy in town. He sits down, takes off his glasses, and eyes Ante for a couple of shot-reverse shot takes, before the latter gets up and pours him a drink, silently. The use of the western genre convention is here meant to give the viewer an idea of how to relate to the characters (in particular Antiša, as the conventional villain of the story). But the unnatural fit between the genre and the content (explicated through deliberately visible editing that breaks the seamless flow of the story), emphasized further through humorous play with conventions and tropes, creates a distance for

the viewer. By focusing on creating artificiality, the filmic text appears to balance between wanting to speak of the present – and a little about the past – and refusing to acknowledge the full meaning of what is spoken.

In place of genre adaptation to the local context, *72 dana* offers visual nostalgia through vaguely hidden dialogicality. The film shares its structure, type of humor, and even actors (Bogdan Diklić) with a Yugoslav classic by the Serbian director Slobodan Šijan, *Maratonci trče počasni krug* (*The Marathon Family*, 1982). One of the most well-known Yugoslav films, *Maratonci* is a story about the five generations of the same family Topalović, all men. The men bicker about their part of the family heritage after the oldest member of the family, Pantelija, dies a sudden death, while the world slowly changes around them, and the WWII is right around the corner. *72 dana* takes a lot of its humor from referencing the film (including the form of dialogue between characters), as well as some of its critical stance towards society. The film's characters are equally selfish, incompetent and live in a similar level of disorganization and repeating patterns as do the characters of Šijan's film. But the film does not keep the political undertone of the referent, which can be read as an allegory of post-Tito Yugoslavia. The critique of the dominant narrative in *72 dana* is thus in no way assisted through the connection; instead it merely distracts from the film's critical tone.

A question follows: what makes the emphasis on artificiality of the films' framing of the past significantly different from films discussed in Chapter V? While the power of genre or intertextual citation can be harnessed to emphasize the features that are relevant for the message of the filmic texts (e.g. Serb soldiers presented as zombies in *Broj 55*; see Chapter V), it can also overpower and dominate the story, drawing attention not simply to the artificiality of own narrative (and thus its own narrative character), but to the expressive means themselves, at the expense of the relevant message.

The depoliticization, finally, is an additional problem. By showing likeness between Duško and Ante, *Dva igrača s klupe* presents its characters as closer to each other than they are to the elite. They are both ordinary men who never had much choice and whose voices are rarely heard. The implication is that, on the level of the non-powerful, reconciliation is possible because of their common position of oppression,¹⁴⁶ and because of their similar experience, in which they were both misled to think they are doing something more heroic than it actually was. But alliance is not formed just on what is spoken or shared between the two. It rests on silence about those elements of the war that surpass their own narrow experiences. The film does not say much about the war, apart from the fact that someone else has allegedly benefitted from it and not those who fought in it (the motives and gains of the ‘winners’ are never explored or specified). It questions little of the reasons for the war; and while it demystifies the character of the villain by explaining his participation as a matter of pressure rather than choice, this is implied to be valid only for characters like Duško – and says little about those more powerful. Rather, it *bypasses* substantial questions and potential disagreements between the characters.

The film’s structure is built on demonstrating how easy it is to create a false narrative and make it seem “true.” Duško and Ante seamlessly step into the characters of war criminals Mato and Joso. But the aim of that demonstration is here not to discuss problems of narrating recent history, but rather to expose the holders of power as exploiters of powerless people for their (again, never specified) goals. For a film whose structure is so deeply entrenched in the problematics of the manipulation in forming narratives on history, *Dva igrača s klupe* ends up saying remarkably little about the war itself; and considering how much of the film is structured around the dialogue between characters that concerns the war, the film narrative’s own dialogue with the official narrative is limited. *72 dana* is here less ambiguous: the film does not fall into the populist framework, assuming that Mane and Mile are somehow united because they are

¹⁴⁶ In interviews, Šorak thus frequently speaks of “them“ as “the ruling class”; see for example Sandić, 2012.

commonly oppressed by higher powers. Yet just like its comedic counterpart, by relying solely on stories about the friendships that survived the war – and pointing out how they did so, thus challenging the idea that they were enemies by default – it tells little about the war that did happen beyond the small-scale, or anything that was truly controversial about it.

In conclusion, the two films discussed in this section start from very different agendas and political positions; for one, while one film speaks about the Croatian Serbs and the need to bypass the domestic divisions, the other appears to look across national borders for similarities and ties between characters. Yet these films end up proposing a similar strategy towards the past: a bypassing of wartime divisions based on the necessity to live together in the present. Their impact, in terms of what they “do” to the dominant narrative of the war, is thus rather similar. But it should be noted that their different agendas do remain. *Dva igrača s klupe* ultimately pushes for an agenda that opens itself much more to convergences with all sorts of nationalist interpretations than does *72 dana*, which rejects ethnic divisions not as a means to a higher end, but as an unnecessary division based on false narratives. Both films acknowledge the existence of such narratives (Croatian and Serbian) and offer a defense that starts from the bottom up: what is narrated from the top as unity and historical animosity can be dissipated by challenging the validity of those claims on the micro-social level (*72 dana*) and by contrasting the meaning these narratives were given externally (top-down) to those that, in retrospect, are revealed among the participants themselves in a filmic dialogue (*Dva igrača s klupe*).

That the two films eventually downplay their own political impact appears to speak more to the immense power of the official narrative than to the lack of interest in speaking of the war anew. Yet these films still do try to narrate the war differently on the table. The final group of films, discussed in the next chapter, does not. While they keep the presence of the war, treating it – similar to here – as not just a part of the past but of the present as well, they reduce

the war from having any kind of explicated own narrative to only bits and segments here and there, a background to everyday life. Yet these references to the war past still matter in terms of narrating historical events, as the next chapter will show.

6 CHAPTER SIX: FILMS ASSUMING THE PAST

The earlier chapters covered films that engage in re-narrating recent history (Chapter IV) through critical dealing with the past, as well as those that focus on creating a new narrative for the present, and are pressed into engaging dialogically with the dominant narrative because the present requires so (Chapter V). In this chapter, I discuss films that take a third kind of dialogical relationship to the past: they do not provide a rewriting of the narrative of the ‘Homeland War’, nor do they offer an extensive critique of the core elements of the dominant memory narrative. Focusing predominantly on issues of the present, these films do not narrate the past, although in some its presence is more prominent than in others. In other words, most literature on memory films would not consider these films of value at all. In this chapter, I diverge from the dominant stream of literature in which films that are meaningful for our memory of the past are solely those that narrate it or critically rewrite the already existing narratives.

Cinema that doesn’t directly deal with the war can still speak of the war in meaningful ways, and influence the manner in which war is thought of (see Gilić, 2014, p. 12). Yet the emphasis in studying memory and film remains on those films that create memory, rather than those that stabilize and maintain it. The question is thus not whether these films can still tell us something about the war, but whether they can be meaningful and relevant in the context of collective memory. This chapter answers this question affirmatively, proposing a turn towards the latter films. It considers ways in which a dialogue with the past can be minimal, yet still impactful on maintaining a certain memory of the past.

Films examined in this chapter do what I call *assuming the past*. They assume the existence of a particular memory of the war – the dominant one; yet they do not debate it. Instead, they rely on the fact that the past is present in everyday life. In other words: they rely on the kind of memory-saturated environment I argued defined present-day Croatia (see

Chapter III). The films build on these assumptions and assume that the viewer comes to the film with the memory of the war already in mind. They then subtly reinforce or challenge it, thus helping to maintain and stabilize a memory narrative, which makes them relevant in the context of memory debates. In terms of content, these films rarely offer more than a general intonation guiding the viewer in how the war should be interpreted. What they all recognize is that the present is haunted by the past: the legacy of 90's marks present-day society, the effect of the war palpable both for those that have experienced it and those who were born only after. At stake here is not so much postmemory (Hirsch, 1992, 1997, 2008, 2012), the idea of a generational transfer of remembrance of a burdensome past, but rather the fact that younger generations are growing up in an environment shaped by the war experience: the breakdown of societal values, the normalcy of hatred, the lack of socio-economic opportunities, and the inability of veterans to reintegrate into society are thus all presented as consequences of the 1990s, a period in which the war played a major role.

The filmic texts discussed here are built around these issues of the present that are seen as consequences of the past. They can thus be fully understood only when completed with a narrative of the past (several borderline cases are discussed below): in order to be able to find meaning in certain characters and scenes, it is necessary to see them with a relationship towards the past “added”, written in. They provide only cues in the process; yet these cues – the fragments that are selected to evoke the memory of the war needed to complete the narrative – are thus crucial for the analysis. Moreover, while dialogicality is always conditioned also by the (implied) viewer, here the relationship is particularly emphasized, as engagement in the form of recognition of cues is needed to complete the narrative.

In Chapter II, I have discussed the narrativity of memory, and reasons why collective memory is built around narratives – including why Pierre Nora's concept of places of memory is ultimately a narrative-tied concept. The films discussed here work, in fact, almost as a version

of these places of memory, one which embraces an empty space kept for a narrative to be added in. Rather than building a narrative of their own, they trigger an existing narrative already in circulation, thus perpetuating it and maintaining a certain environment of memory, or ironizing is slightly in an attempt to question it. This is mostly done without the specific formal means employed in films discussed in Chapter IV, or the rhetorical battles typical of films in Chapter V: in fact, the films in this chapter are both thematically and stylistically varied. What remains common throughout for a segment of these films, however – those that support the dominant narrative to an extent – is the familiar character of the veteran.

Below I discuss this group of films that subtly imply memory readings, starting from those that affirm the dominant narrative, then moving to those that try to invite a different narrative, sometimes offering new ideas of their own, but never articulating a proper critique. The entire chapter is driven by the idea that, if “every media representation is a subjective construction, which is selected from a myriad of possible representations (Mikos, 2014, p. 409),” all those representations should be taken seriously¹⁴⁷.

6.1 Evoking the past, supporting the narrative

6.1.1 The role of the veteran

The analyzed films that invite the perpetuation of the dominant discourse of the war share one common trait: they point to the indebtedness the present owes to the character of the veteran, or, in a more toned-down version, the feeling of unease that the character implies. In case of indebtedness, the association is usually straightforward: while this is unspoken, writing in the dominant narrative into the film text reveals that the debt is due for their role in the war. Unlike narrative-reinforcing films discussed in Chapter IV, however – which clearly articulated courage and brotherhood as features of the soldier, giving an idea of what this gratitude should

¹⁴⁷ Mikos' quote continues to add „...and which is also determined by particular interests” (Mikos, 2014). While this is not inherently untrue, this thesis explores the way the power of narrative can result in responses that go beyond the implied interest of the author/producer.

be based in – these films don't articulate the specific features that would work as a reason for this. They do not tell stories of courage or glory. They also do not idealize the present as a result of a great victory: more often than not they are critical of the present. Yet there is an implicit assumption that the present disappoints the past, because it doesn't embrace openly enough the sacrifice of the veteran: the sacrifice that is implied and requires the viewer to "write it" into the narrative. Such framing invites a positive, uncritical reading of the war.

In the case of unease, the association is that of sacrifice: as veteran characters are presented as having sacrificed something (e.g. their health), the immediate question becomes: what was the sacrifice for? In the absence of a better pre-given answer, the dominant narrative steps in. The two films that emphasize the sense of debt owed to veterans – *Prezimiti u Riju* (*Hibernation in Rio*; Davor Žmegač, 2002) and *Happy Endings* (Darko Šuvak, 2014) – thus offer a stronger platform for the dominant narrative. The rest, more focused on the unease at the society's treatment of veterans, are more ambivalent, as if attempting to strike a balance between praising the veterans and questioning the war as such.

What is notable is that these films don't glorify the veteran character of the present; in fact, these films demonstrate Car's (Car, 2008, 2009) diagnosis of a shift from hero to "problem" in constructing the media image of the veteran in the post-war period. This imagery, however, is not contradictory with the emphasis on heroism imprinted in memory. The way these films responded to the war shares some similarity with De Carvalho's diagnosis of Hollywood reducing the Vietnam war stories to individual stories of courage and heroism (Carvalho, 2006) – with the notable difference that the 'Homeland War' was, in fact, not lost but won. The most common character of the veteran is thus the disappointed soldier: someone who deserved better than he got in the end. What made the character deserving is not specified: there are no grand monologues of national independence, no celebrations of unseen heroism (although occasionally there are limited flashbacks to war years). The implication is that the

soldier had fought for something that was “right,” only to be left deprived afterwards. The veteran character in the present is frequently a misfit, someone who cannot find his place within society. The blame is cast not on the character himself, but on the society letting him down.

These films do not necessarily comply with all the tenets of the official narrative; yet by approaching its core character as a kind of flawed hero, they leave the space open for embracing the greatness of the war story, even if – or especially in the light of – the fact that the post-war reality did not fulfill its promise. The character of the soldier thus becomes an odd one. At present he (always a male) is a burden to society, a threat, or both. At the same time, he is worthy of respect precisely because he was a soldier, to whom the country owes gratitude.

6.1.1.1 The debt

Prezimiti u Riju tells the story of Grga, an elderly veteran, now homeless and living in an old bus. When he learns that his estranged daughter Monika is coming for a visit from Germany, Grga tries to fake a middle-class life – by breaking into the apartment of an old military friend, now a local tycoon, Rafael. Grga and Rafael had parted ways after Grga, trying to protect the rest of his post-war unit from entering shady deals with Rafael, burned down the trailer they lived in in a fit of anger. Rafael finds out about the break-in and sends his men after Grga and his daughter. In their final encounter, Rafael is shot by other mafia men, and the father and daughter temporarily reunite. Set mostly in the present-day Zagreb, the film occasionally travels back in time to show Grga as a soldier; yet the footage does not depict him in battle, but rather in moments of calm, emphasizing the camaraderie within the unit (which will be destroyed by the post-war reality). In the present, he is unadjusted, his mental issues untreated, and he repeatedly breaks the law by moving into Rafael’s property. Yet the film presents him as the

sympathetic character, in contrast to the corrupt structures ruling the city. Grga's impossibility to integrate into society is depicted like a flaw on the society's part.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, in *Happy Endings*, in which two miserable middle-aged masseuses decide to rob a bank to pay off their debts and afford their own massage parlor, the character of the veteran – husband to one of the women – is depicted as depressed, poor, and disabled. Due to his state, he is not able to provide for his family, and he feels the pressure of the fact that it is now his wife who is the main breadwinner: so much so that he is considering ending his life.

The two films share an underlying idea: that the two veterans have deserved something better than they got, and that this is due to their service to their country. The homelessness and unemployment are serious issues; yet what makes these men deserving is not their difficult situation in the present, but their veteran status: their present situation seems narrative exaggerated to underline that deservedness. And while both films recognize the characters' impossibility to integrate, this does not change their special standing. Importantly, in both cases, the narratives do not work without the (implied) reference to the war: once the references to the war are removed, the narratives become entirely unclear.

6.1.1.2 *The unease*

The two films discussed above insist on the special deservedness of the veteran. Those discussed in this subsection offer a subtler version of the same argument. *Ispod crte (Under the Line*, Petar Krelja, 2003) follows a few days in the life of Toni, a young man trying to navigate between three groups: the company of his former friends who are planning a robbery; his crush Zrinka, who is about to leave for Italy in search for work; and his family, a caring mother, a veteran father and a little sister. The father is in constant pain due to a shrapnel remaining in his brain, the consequence of a war injury. This makes him unpredictable and occasionally

¹⁴⁸ This is illustrated also through a scene in which Grga, bleeding from a head wound after encountering Rafael's men, is confronted by a young waiter for looking indecent. At the same time, Grga's fight for the homeland that didn't materialize is implied through a scene in which he lights up the home/train wagon, trying to expel the criminal gang while a large Croatian flag hangs on the wagon side - symbolizing a state taken over by criminals.

violent, but mostly bedridden. When a shootout with Toni's gang members causes his father to go into a violent rampage, putting both himself his wife into hospital, Toni is left to navigate between his mother's desire to see her daughter and his grandparents' reluctance to allow her to, rooted in old family disagreements.

Put lubenica (*Melon Route*; Branko Schmidt, 2008) tells the story of a solitary man, Mirko, who assists in smuggling Chinese people (the title's "watermelons") across the Bosnian-Croatian border. One day all but one of his smuggled men drown in a boat accident. Plagued by guilt over their death, Mirko decides to help the lone survivor migrate further down to Germany – a decision that brings him into conflict with the smugglers, eventually leading to a bloody showdown.

In the two films, the feeling of unease is caused by injury or illness related to the war: in *Ispod crte*, it is the pain from the physical presence of the past in the body of Toni's father, causing him to moan in agony, which haunts the other characters. In *Put lubenica*, Mirko's illness – likely PTSD – demonstrates itself primarily through his behavior: he is isolated, and spends his nights unable to sleep, switching the lights in his cabin on and off. In both cases, their injuries are permanent imprints of the characters' status: the history on their bodies is a reminder for all around them to remember, triggering the reflection on the war.

In both, there is also a sense of disappointment with how things turned out in the present. *Ispod crte* explores the heritage the war left to the youth: nearly all characters have trouble finding a job, leading them to turn to crime (as Toni's friends) or move abroad (as Zrinka plans to do). Moreover, it emphasizes the burden passed from the father to the son in this context: Toni is trapped in an impossible position in which he cannot find the conditions to lead an adult life yet feels the pressure to do so because of his father's state. And while *Put lubenica* depicts the Bosnian rather than Croatian everyday, it does so through western genre conventions: everyone – including the law enforcement – are corrupt, criminals or about to become so.

Mirko's only friend is a local Roma boy – a character that serves to underline Mirko's own position as an outcast, a minority in his own right, who doesn't fit in and is only capable of communicating with those similar to him.

Finally, in both films, the veteran is once again incapable of integrating into society. Yet both films raise sympathy for the character precisely because of his status. This is best seen in their endings. In *Put lubenica*, the final showdown sees Mirko entering a Bosnian saloon like a solitary enforcer of justice, killing everyone to take away the girl; in *Ispod crte*, the father threatens to blow himself up with a hand grenade if he is not immediately reconnected with his daughter, whom Toni then brings over. In both films, the sympathy is, however, still with the veteran characters. It is precisely this sympathy, combined with the emphasized suffering of the characters which causes unease, that ultimately invites a background war story that is kind to the soldier/veteran – the damaged character that cannot find a place in an even more damaged world.

6.1.2 The outlier

Finally, there is one film that explicates its support for the dominant narrative by critiquing those that ignore it, but without evoking the character of the veteran. In *Što je Iva snimila 21. listopada 2003.* (*What Iva Recorded*, Tomislav Radić, 2005), a deconstruction of the values and issues in contemporary Croatian society made in the style of Dogme95 cinema, the war is mentioned only in passing by a young woman, who states that she was 10 years old when it started and barely has any recollection of it. What appears as a passing remark is in fact telling. The young woman is a prostitute, presented in a negative light: the film makes a connection between the negative connotations of her work and the work of the remaining characters. She is speaking her mind at a birthday dinner a father organized for his daughter, the titular Iva, solely to be able to invite a potential business partner from Germany, who he is hoping will

invest some money. The night does not go as planned: the family father overspends himself at a local restaurant trying to impress the guest, who greedily and subtly requests sexual services from his wife. The family unit is a stand-in for the country, which is trying to sell out to the “West” using all means necessary. Ironically, the opposite of the sellout is implied to be the honoring of the war – as the genuine domestic societal value which has been forgotten among the protagonists.

6.2 Giving the past a negative intonation

Invitations to a more critical observation of the war differ significantly in how much they imply, but also how much negativity they ascribe. They all reaffirm the relevance of the war for the present; yet they bring it to mind with very different ideas.

6.2.1 The role of the veteran

Previous two chapters have demonstrated the veteran to be the central figure of concern when debating the narrative of the past, whether it is to affirm or to counter it. In the subchapter above, I have also pointed out the use of the veteran character to keep the memory of dominant narrative – the memory of memory, so to speak – alive, reinforcing it by evoking it. Yet the soldier/veteran character is also frequently used to change the tone of the debate about the war, without offering an explicit narrative of wartime. The negative portrayal, however, works because of the familiarity with the positive one: the reduction of the war narrative to collective sacrifice and heroism embodied in the veteran makes the deconstruction of that image so powerful.

6.2.1.1 The unease

In some of the films, the veteran character creates a different kind of unease: one associated with a dysfunctional society in which the character is again the central figure, this time because he is the direct cause of that unease, both a proxy for the overarching, stifling presence of the war in everyday life and the source of untamed aggression that arises out of a sense of privilege.

In *Fine mrtve djevojke* (*Fine Dead Girls*, Dalibor Matanić, 2002), which portrays an intolerant Croatian post-war society with regard to the LGBTQ community, one of the side characters is a war veteran. He beats his wife and terrorizes the neighborhood by blasting loud music at night. In this case, the veteran is depicted as dangerous and unpredictable, but also as a figure of self-assured power, which derives from the dominant narrative: tying the country's historical striving for independence to the 'Homeland War' created the paradoxical situation in which the veterans (*branitelji*) are perceived as being above the law – historically reflected in the statement in 2015 by the then-prime minister Karamarko that the law does not apply to veterans (R.I., 2017). The song played by the character in the film, the unofficial war anthem *Čavoglave* by Marko Perković Thompson, adds another layer to the story: in contrast to the film, it doesn't just embrace the dominant narrative but surpasses it. By evoking a confident, threatening demeanor of the soldier, the lyrics are not in alliance with the official discourse of victimhood; the song celebrates the dark spots of the war that are lacking in the political narrative, showing how the narrative evolved in cultural memory. The film thus points to the terror of the past over the present, implying the whole country to be captive of the war – and its unquestionable dominant narrative, which allows people like this to see themselves as a special part of society.

Unpredictability and destabilization without the power reappear in the veteran characters in *Metastaze* (*Metastases*, 2009; see also discussion below) and in *Fleke* (*Spots*, 2011): in the former, through the character of the veteran and local thug, Krpa, who terrorizes his neighborhood (including his own friends); in the latter, through the character of the taxi driver who picks up the film's two young protagonists, pulls out a gun and forces one of them to stage a robbery on him and stop the car. In *Metastaze*, two of the main characters are in fact veterans. One expresses his wartime past as aggression, the other (Kizo) as passivity – yet both express a similar kind of unpredictability. During a bar meeting with Kizo's wartime friends,

violence erupts from disagreement over the prominence of their role in the war (whose unit was more important?). Veterans are thus represented as a permanent source of societal tension.

Moreover, in all three films, society is a match for the veterans' madness. In *Fine mrtve djevojke*, the building in which the film takes place reveals itself to be home to a plethora of disturbed characters; in *Metastaze*, Krpa's gang is just a small part of the city's malfunctioning underground; in *Fleke*, one of the girls willingly plays along. Both films thus emphasize the captivity of society by the negative heritage of the war period.

6.2.1.2 *The narrative manipulation*

The heroic character of the veteran is, as was elaborated on many examples until now, a narrative construct. With that in mind, several films open space for a critical reevaluation of the dominant narrative by presenting the veteran narrative as a performance, an invented narrative, a story that might not be true.

In Kristijan Milić's *Sigurna kuća* (*Safe house*, 2002)¹⁴⁹, one part of the omnibus *24 sata* (*24 Hours*), three corrupt policemen safeguard a drug trafficking head under protection as a witness. The witness, however, seems to know surprisingly much about their careers – including that one of them was involved in torturing a Serb civilian during the war. Or was he – as maybe the narrator is simply unreliable?

In *Karaula* (*Border Post*, Rajko Grlić, 2006), a different kind of narrative unreliability is implied: that of the ethnic “other” as the evil enemy, through showing soldiers in an JNA barrack prior to the war united by friendship and personal interests (e.g. music tastes). Without explicitly mentioning the war, the film thus raises a “what if”, challenging the dominant narrative's insistence on the clear ethnic division between friend and enemy.

¹⁴⁹This film is particularly interesting because Milić will go on to film *Broj 55*, the film that most literally repeats the dominant narrative.

In a story from the omnibus *Kratki spojevi* (*Short circuits*, 2013), the character of the veteran threatens to detonate a hand grenade and commit suicide at a shopping mall. Amidst the panic, however, the attempt is prevented by an intervention from a girl in the audience, and then interrupted by the police – at which point it reveals itself as a poorly staged performance, and thus a fake narrative. The film reveals how easy it is to tell a convincing story and gain credibility for it, in particular if it relates to the war: if the audience believes the performance, it becomes good enough. Moreover, by turning the veteran into a fake veteran-performer, the film raises doubts over who can be considered a veteran in the first place: who has the right to this performance, and whom is it for?

In *Šuma Summarum* (Ivan-Goran Vitez, 2010), a satire on Croatia's opening up to neo-liberalism, characters keep bringing up their war experience in random contexts; yet the viewer is unsure of how much of this can be trusted, and how much is fabricated (which is also a question for the characters in the film). In films such as *Ljubavni život domobrana* (*Love Life of a Gentle Coward*, also by Pavo Marinković, 2009) and *Ljudožder vegetarijanac* (*Vegetarian Cannibal*, Branko Schmidt, 2012) high military titles are used as synonyms for war profiteers. The meaning of these terms – and that of “veteran” thus becomes elusive as well.

The narrative of the soldier can also be the object of laughter. *Što je muškarac bez brkova* (*What is a Man Without the Mustache*, Hrvoje Hribar, 2005) playfully subverts the hero-image of the soldier by – again – pointing out to the discrepancy between words and actions. In the post-war setting, a troop of soldiers, led by their womanizing commander, receive an order to carry a young woman's broken-down vehicle down the road to the nearest gas station. The task is futile and ridiculous; yet the demeanor and the speech surrounding it are serious, pointing to the lack of overlap between describing an action and doing it – one that can equally be applied to the dominant narrative itself.

These films all start from the representation of the soldier in the dominant narrative, then move on to propose a deconstruction either in the past or in the present. What they however don't do is offer an alternative character of their own.

6.2.2 The war as loss and spillover violence

Earlier it was pointed out how *Ispod crte* thematizes the transfer of the war experience from father to son. In that film, what is notable is the agency the son eventually manages to take: not only does he reunite the family, but he also stops the cycle of violence by both rejecting to participate in an arms robbery and stopping his father to commit suicide. Other films, however, do not share this optimism. The films discussed here reveal the visible legacy of the war – in contrast to the dominant narrative's praise of success and the breakdown of historical violence (of Serbs towards Croats) – as one of either permanent loss or opening a cycle of violence that has yet to be closed. Again, these films do not offer their own story of the war; but they imply a negative evaluation of the war from the future marked by it.

In *Polagana predaja* (*Slow Surrender*, 2001), an adaptation and update on Goran Tribuson's 1984 novel of the same name, Petar Gorjan, an advertising agency executive, decides to turn his life around the company he works for announces a takeover by real-estate moguls and his wife requests a divorce. The film follows his road trip – accompanied by two strangers he encounters along the way – to Dubrovnik, to conclude a real-estate deal. In the film, it is the visibly lacking bodies of children to whom Petar delivers wheelchairs that embody the loss in their missing limbs, while the ruins of the once-glorious hotel Petar is to buy (indicatively named Libertas), as well as a subplot involving another character's deceased mother, a refugee – emphasize the physical damage and human loss.

In Arsen Anton Ostojić's 2004 film *Ta divna splitska noć* (*A Beautiful Night in Split*), a mosaic of three stories taking place on a New Year's Eve in the city of Split, the violence is a result of both what the war took away, and what it left. In the first of three stories, a young

widow and mother of a small boy engages in a relationship with a local petty criminal and veteran Nike, who is preparing to smuggle a pack of heroin into Germany. Nike notifies Marija of his trip only that evening and leaves after gifting the boy a toy gun. The boy also keeps the real gun of his father, a soldier killed in war. After a series of unexpected events, having nowhere else to turn to, Nike returns to Marija instead of going for Germany. There, he meets the boy carrying a gun and, convinced it is the toy gun gifted earlier, encourages him to shoot – ending up fatally wounded. In the film, the absence of a father figure, who is present only through the gun as family memorabilia, leads to death.

Zvonimir Jurić's segment of the 2004 omnibus *Seks, piće i krvoproliće* (*Sex, Booze and Bloodshed*; Boris T. Matić, Zvonimir Jurić, Antonio Nuić), a story about the confrontation between police officers securing a Dinamo-Hajduk game and two childhood friends, is notable because here the veteran is not the violent character, but rather the one who tries to de-escalate the situation as it escalates into violence because of miscommunication between characters – as if to imply a kind of spillover effect of violence from the past into the present. Finally, in *Hitac* (*One Shot*, Robert Orhel, 2013), two women of different generations – a student and a policewoman – are brought together by an accidentally fired shot. The shot is fired from a gun accidentally discovered in storage boxes, presumably left over from the war.

6.2.3 Can an assumed past be a shared story?: Narrative ownership and its exceptions

The films assuming the past usually do not give much thought to narrative ownership. The war narrative belongs almost exclusively to “us”, the side in which the ethnic and the civic gets conflated together. Thus, while “our” – “Croatian” – story does not immediately imply that it belongs to only one ethnicity, in practice it almost exclusively does, as stories of Croatian citizens of Serb, Hungarian and other ethnicities, or even foreigners who have fought the war on “our” side are still not a part of dominant memory.

Yet there are a few films that subtly expand the narrative ownership, without really situating it within a wider narrative – instead, this is again left to the viewer. The 2008 tragicomedy *Kino Lika* (*The Lika Cinema*, Dalibor Matanić) reminds the viewer that Serbs are treated as the ‘other’ by default, as if everyone of Serb ethnicity was an accomplice in the war – although this is, the film implies, only the case in people’s heads. “I’ll go shit behind the Serb’s house”, a friend tells the slightly simple Mike in Matanić’s film while taking his trousers off behind what looks like a house in the rebuilding process, “they shat enough on us during the war.” *Kino Lika* does not endorse the behavior of its character; the described scene is meant to challenge rather than embrace the simple “us-them” narrative.

Metastaze (*Metastases*, Branko Schmidt, 2009) offers a more in-depth expansion of ownership. The film follows a group of friends as they try to navigate contemporary Zagreb and come together for football matches of their favorite team, NK Dinamo. The violent Krpa; the kind alcoholic Kizo; Filip, a drug addict who just came back from rehab; and Dejo, the nice-boy-turned-drug-smuggler, spend their days with no clear purpose. *Metastaze* is primarily a film about the Croatian transition and the “lost generation” of young people who grew up, without access to opportunities and stability, into angry, resentful individuals. It, focuses on the breakdown of societal values, placing the figures of war veterans within that spectrum.¹⁵⁰

One of the four friends, Dejo, is a Serb, as reflected in his nickname – Srbin. Dejo lives with his father, a soft-spoken, over-the-top polite man who speaks with a thick Serbian accent.¹⁵¹ His demeanor is cautious: his door is double-locked, and he checks who arrives

¹⁵⁰ The film also contains one more interesting exchange, namely Krpa’s observation that the three soldiers of the other brigade fought and stole in Bosnia, rather than in Croatia. Krpa’s words here go beyond simple fact statement into very political dialogue: the narrative of Croatian involvement in the war in Bosnia is virtually non-existent in both Croatian films and public memory, which is a paradox as many people have personal memories of being sent to the front there, but the official politics denies it (Pavičić, 2002, 2017). In fact, while quite a few films produced or co-produced in Croatia deal with the war in Bosnia, none deal with the involvement of the Croatian armed forces in the conflict. Moreover, while the conflict played out between three sides, Croatian-produced films tend to focus on the conflict between Muslims and Serbs, while remaining strangely silent over the role Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina played in the conflict.

¹⁵¹ Dejo has no accent, and the difference can thus be taken as that between two generations, one born in Zagreb and the other coming to it during Yugoslavia.

through the keyhole as if afraid of something. There is a sense of insecurity, unease about living in this city, the kind that surpasses the discomfort of other characters, indicating unpleasant experiences during the war, a fact hardly present in Croatian films. The film thus implies that in contemporary Zagreb, being “the other” is still uncomfortable. Yet Dejo is at the same time not “the other,” and neither is his father. Dejo leads the same life, goes to the same bars, cheers for the same football team, and likely has the same experience of the 90s as Filip (who also did not go to war). By portraying him as one of the crew, the film reminds the viewer that the narrative of both the war as an omnipresent disappointment and the present as an extension of that disappointment belongs to him just as much as to anyone else.

Finally, there is *Most na kraju svijeta* (*The Bridge at the End of the World*, Branko Ištvančić 2014), a film about the disappearance of an elderly man from a village now filled with refugees from Bosnia, and once inhabited by Croatian Serbs. The film introduces several Serb refugees who come from Serbia to see their old houses, to which they may be returning. The characters are reduced to a minimal presence without agency: not only is the main Serb character mute, thus unable to speak for himself, but his story is there to emphasize the complexity of the feeling of nostalgia for one’s home, which will prove itself key to the film’s other, Croat characters. Yet the subtle introduction of Serb characters who are not war criminals does invite the viewer to write into the film a more critical understanding of what happened.

6.2.4 The outliers

6.2.4.1 The war as past in the present

As among the films that evoke a favorable memory of the war, there are two films here that evoke a negative one, without really dealing with the war. One ties the war to a feeling at best, offering no narrative of its own to give meaning to what had happened; the other acknowledges it without dealing with it at all. Yet It places the war simultaneously into the present and the past: while the meaning of the war, the reasons, the events seem long faded, the war remains a

continuous presence – similar to *Kino Lika* (discussed above), yet in a much more prominent way. The war never gets off the screen: it is imprinted in the characters' bodies (Mirjana's child would have never been conceived without it), their destinies, but also in the space around them.

In *Oprosti za kung-fu* (*Sorry for the Kung Fu*, Ognjen Sviličić, 2004), the space is the empty, barely populated landscape of the once-occupied territory, the mine fields that limit the characters' movement. The bodies here, however, are not those of veterans, but of ordinary people. The film, a comedy set in the poor rural village in Zagora, tells a story of Mirjana, a female refugee returning from Germany to her home, pregnant. Her conservative parents try to marry her off to a local man to avoid the shame of a fatherless child – a pursuit cut short by her giving birth to an Asian-looking child. The film is set in the deprived Dalmatian province still covered in mine fields, and as the mines slowly get removed, her conservative family grows to love her child; the mines serve as both a relic of the war and a symbol of family tension (see analysis by Šošić, 2009), both of which these people are unable to escape. The characters at home are shown as having little agency over anything but their opinions: frequent wide shots emphasize their physical isolation, and even the mines have for years simply been there, and they could do nothing but avoid them. The film contrasts the views of two generations on the same experience: the parents have embraced the nationalist narrative; for Mirjana it was a forced situation of cultural broadening. The film, however, leaves it at that, observing the characters in a depopulated, empty setting without exploring it further. The war lingers under the surface: a sad background to the family's life, which once changed their life trajectories, but which we also learn nothing else about.

What ultimately makes the film an outlier, however, is its optimism: just as the mine field is slowly being cleared out, the war is slowly disappearing from life, opening space for something better in the future. Just as Mirjana's father ultimately accepts the identity of her child, different kinds of acceptance, which recognize the past and leave it behind, are also

possible. *Oprosti za kung-fu* thus sits strangely between evoking the memory of the war and advocating for its forgetting. Moreover, while the film's humorous tone works in part due to its direct opposition to the dominant narrative, the narrative itself is here not essential to understand the film, which eschews inviting any factuality of the war into the film.

In *Sveci* (*Saints*, Ivan Perić, 2014), a comedic take on the topic of petty criminals unwilling to change their ways, a salesman mentions only in passing that he was once a soldier and is now forced to sell stolen or forged goods on an improvised local market. The period of the 1990s is thus related to economic inequality and social atomization: the impossibility of finding work, of leading a decent life. Yet the film says nothing about the reasons for the war, its legitimacy or the place in the national narrative. Moreover, the character of the veteran is not given a prominent place here, he is not implied to be more deserving (see above) or special or in any way entitled to something. He is just there, the same as everyone else, waiting for something to happen.

6.2.4.2 *The war as past that can(not) be avoided*

Finally, there are films that evoke the war only for the characters to distance themselves from it. What separates them from the rest is that the war is evoked as a background so distant, it doesn't connect with the present in any meaningful way for the characters. These films thus keep the memory of the memory of the war afloat, so to speak, but offer no cues for its understanding, no guidelines to how it should be remembered – and in this sense can be only borderline-representatives of this category.

In *Volim te* (*I love you*, Dalibor Matanić, 2006), a film about a young urban professional dealing with being diagnosed with AIDS, the war is mentioned in passing as something of a foreign narrative to the main character. Yet in the context, it means nothing more than a desire for disconnection of the entitled, rich urban youth from the recent past, which they naively think they can escape. Similarly, in *Neka ostane među nama* (*Just Between Us*, Rajko Grlić, 2010),

the characters – a plethora of urban adults, from artists to bank clerks, who enjoy lives filled with affairs and intrigues and are comfortably middle-class – articulate their lack of connection to the war. If the films imply anything, it is that the social positioning of the characters has shielded them from the war; this opens up space to think about those who were not so fortunate. Yet the story of the war ends there.

In conclusion, this chapter discussed films that do not offer much discussion on the past. Instead, they offer glimpses, ideas, interpretive angles, turning the war into a filmic narrative fragment rather than giving it a narrative of its own. The diversity of these films, the scarcity of the information they offer and thus the difficulty to explicate their relevance with regard to narrating the war makes them hard to bring together; yet their own insistence that the war is, despite all of this, worthy of mention and thus of focus was reason enough not to exclude them from the analysis. While these films are in no way memory films in the proper sense (Erll, 2011), they would be difficult to ignore in an analysis that explores hidden dialogicality precisely because they assume so much going on under the surface: the little explication they offer can be taken as a sign of how much is in fact assumed, and how many utterances about the war these films integrate, even if they reply with so little.

How do these dialogues work, and what should one think of them when thinking of the relationship between film and memory? In terms of memory, as I mentioned earlier, these films work perhaps the most similarly to a narrow understanding of Nora's sites of memory: they invoke memory because narratives are all around them, waiting to be invited. Like a statue or a named street, they do not contain the key to the narrative of history they respond to but are instead reminders of the existence of that narrative. Moreover, they do, as I have shown, provide guidance into how one should remember the war, and they do so by either inviting the dominant

narrative to be written in or offering glimpses of subversion – understandable again only because it works against the same narrative.

Even if these films invite a positive evaluation of the war, why would I claim that it will be the dominant narrative that is written in? Cannot sympathy with the plight of the veteran be tied to other narratives? What needs to be remembered here is that the stock of memory stories is, while theoretically infinite, in practice not unlimited; and if films provide space for accommodating the narratives we already have, sticking to the familiar is likely to be the outcome much rather than a continuous rethinking anew. In this sense, my pessimistic estimate is that many of these films – in particular those that support some tenets of the dominant narrative – are likely to serve as stabilizing platforms for the dominant narrative in its totality. On the other hand, films that invite criticism without articulating clearly their positions are likely to not have a memory impact at all, except through being called out by veterans' groups as subverting the dominant narrative. The burden of rewriting the stories anew is too much, especially once we reconsider Tulviste and Wertsch's (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994) assertions about the oppositional narratives coming as responsive, but also fragmentary, incoherent and yet still limited by the dominant story. In the memory-saturated context of the Croatian present, in which the dominant narrative is both protected and presented as constantly under attack (thus still not taking on the role of a "myth" in full), any critique is seen as a crushing critique.

7 CONCLUSION

In his 2004 edited volume, Jan-Werner Müller notes that “while very few would doubt that memory mattered and exercised power in the Yugoslav wars, even fewer would be able to explain precisely how it mattered” (Müller, 2004, p. 2). To paraphrase Müller, this dissertation posits that the same is still true of post-war Yugoslavia, and specifically Croatia: memory – and specifically memory of the war – is important and “exercises power” in the day-to-day reality of the country; but how exactly this is the case has been much debated, with no definitive answers. Part of this is due to the fact that the answer is likely complicated, depending on how one understands memory and the manifestation that something matters; yet “it is complicated” is hardly a reason against trying to answer the question.

In this dissertation, I tackled one part of that question, by asking how memory mattered for film and how film tried to matter for memory in the 2001-2014 period. The design of the project was not primarily driven by an interest in memory as such, but rather by the fact that cinema seemed to have consistently attracted the same negative reaction as soon as it would approach the topic of the ‘Homeland War’. More often than not, there would be resistance, protest letters written, with political officials often mincing their words in response – although there seemed to be no reason for them to do so. Why was the topic so contested, and why did it, more often than not, need to include officials responding to matters of culture? What was it that the films “did” that upset the public, and veterans’ associations in particular, so much?

In answering this question, I focused primarily on the film side of this equation by asking first if films really dealt that often with the war at all, or this was a misconception in the public. Once the results of the thematic analysis showed that cinema did in fact talk about the war (although less than the criticisms seemed to suggest), the logical next step was to ask – yes, but how? The thematic analysis had indicated that war not only appeared as a theme - but as a

variety of themes: as the films' cardinal (prominent) theme, but often also as a minor theme and as a frequent thematic subtext.

A more in-depth analysis, nested within the framework of memory studies and designed to try to capture the dialogical relationship between film and the extra-filmic reality, followed. This second stage of analysis revealed the different ways the films that thematized the war responded to the dominant narrative – what I label different strategies. Three dominant strategies were identified – that of dealing with, bypassing and assuming the past – with the first strategy also including different sub-strategies, some of which were additionally explained through additional concepts.

What does this work tell us of memory in Croatia with regard to film, and beyond it? The analysis confirmed that the relationship between film and memory is, as posited above – complicated. But it is complicated in ways that are not always immediately obvious. For one, while the dissertation revolves around cinematic dialogues with a particular, dominant war narrative, the films reveal themselves to be both filled with war stories, and relatively silent of some relevant aspects of the war. They are filled with stories in the sense that they fit the war into an immense number of contexts. In films, the war inhibits rural areas and urban communities, the present and the past, inter-ethnic friendships and brotherly animosities, is shown through military operations and war crimes. At the same time, the dominant narrative is powerful not just in the sense *that* films dialogically respond to it, but also in *how* they do it. In all three groups of films, even films that reject the dominant narrative as incapable of subsuming the whole of war experience under one story offer very few alternative stories of their own. Overall, only one film – *Korak po korak* – depicts the everyday life during wartime, and two (see Chapter V) comment on it. Women and children hardly appear as characters (see also below), and when they do, they are characters in need of protection by a man. Moreover, the “prohibited” topics of the war (Olick, 2007, pp. 40–42), such as internment camps – both Serb

and Croat – are hardly mentioned, except as background context, and when domestic war crimes are thematized, it is never about the victims, but always about the perpetrators. The results of the film analysis, however, certainly defy Pierre Nora’s often-cited idea that there is so much talk about memory because there is so little memory left, unless one thinks explicitly of individual lived memory. Croatian post-war society is in fact saturated with memory, and memory is very much present in film production¹⁵². Even in films where it does not take the central stage, the ‘Homeland War’ is a strongly present, assumed to be familiar to the viewer (see Chapter VI); war memory saturates public space and discourse (see Chapter III).

The analyzed films show that there is no linearity in the development of memory narrative, either. Films tend to follow rather than lead the interventions into the dominant narrative: dissenting ideas are often raised elsewhere (e.g. literature) before they are thematized in a film. Moreover, the changes certain films introduce into the narrative are then revoked in other films that present a more affirming version of the past again. There is thus a constant back-and-forth dialogue not just between films and the dominant narrative, but in a sense also among films themselves – something this dissertation couldn’t explore at length, but that would warrant a future study on inter-filmic dialogicality.

The literature on memory has thus far showed a certain optimism regarding the role of memory in supporting social change in transitional societies, perhaps best embodied in Assmann and Shortt’s assertion that “[m]emory can play a key role in processes of change and transition because it is itself flexible and has a transformative quality” (A. Assmann & Shortt, 2012, p. 3). To add to this optimism, authors such as Jović (2004) have claimed that, while official, imposed memories are typical of authoritarian societies, once a successful transition to democracy is completed, different narratives of memory will be able to freely coexist. Not

¹⁵² Memory is present also in ways this thesis does not explore directly. Several films were based on works written about or inspired by the authors' experience of the war; some of the directors were themselves veterans.

surprisingly, the latter argument requires no more than a look at the policies in democratic countries to be dismantled: tools such as history education and legislating national (and transnational) memories are widespread. Democracy does not equal the absence of collective identity narratives; Pierre Nora's capital work on memory was, after all, dedicated to no other country but France. Assmann and Shortt's optimism is, however, also questionable. Earlier literature has already warned that memory, while changing content, can in fact remain tied to its old schematic narrative templates, bringing the depth of the change post-transition into question (Wertsch, 2012). More importantly, literature on the post-Yugoslav societies – and in particular the excellent study by Ristić (2014) – has pointed out the paradox of memory in these countries: the process of mediation of intervening narratives is consistently limited by the dominant memory (established post-breakup), and thus eschews change rather than promoting it. This dissertation points in a similarly pessimistic direction – perhaps especially since it analyses the country that has (with the exception of Slovenia) proven to be the most stable of the post-Yugoslav states.¹⁵³ It is not just that memory keeps revolving around the same narrative template: it keeps doing so regardless of the political changes in the governing structures (see Chapter III), and also in a sector that has long been considered free of direct political influence, namely cinema. And while theoretical work does exist to explain why political memory has been changing so slowly in Croatia (Ashplant et al., 2000; Banjeglav, 2013b), work on why culture remains focused on particular narratives even in the absence of direct political pressure is still scarce. One possible reason for this is that attempts to engage with culture as a source of political discourse often tend to divide culture into “regime” and “oppositional” (see Chapter II; discussion on Brešan in Chapter IV). While there is some merit to such division, it easily overlooks something that all chapters of this dissertation show, namely that when it comes to

¹⁵³ While levels of democracy are notoriously difficult to measure, the contested yet indicative Freedom House democracy score currently rates Croatia at 3.75 out of 7, a semi-consolidated democracy - a status which has fluctuated only limitedly since 2003. See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/croatia>

the discourse of the war, “regime” and “oppositional” (in the sense of “official” and “counter-memory”) are often not mutually exclusive, but co-existent in one work. Most films tend to provide some space for elements of the dominant narrative, even as they are critical of it overall. The other reason for lack of work on why culture remains focused on particular narratives could be the literature’s focus on generalizable theories, resulting in ideas that simply might not work in transitional societies. One of these ideas is that the popular culture simply reproduces dominant ideas and ideology, which the Croatian case clearly demonstrates to be wrong. The other idea is that bottom-up memory is inherently oppositional memory (Foucault, 1974; Popular Memory Group, 1982), meaning that – once again – culture is necessarily a sphere of contestation. This too, this dissertation shows, is an overly optimistic assumption.

7.1 Contributions

This dissertation offers several contributions to the fields of memory studies and political science. In terms of methodology, it contributes to studying the relationship between memory and cinema by devising a theory-driven methodology that looks at films as embedded into society (and its discourses) in a more systematic manner than is common in the literature. Cinema is not an easy material to code or interpret. Yet through looking at the strategies films employ in dialogue with the recent past on a more general level, I offer a tool for analysis that is potentially applicable in other contexts as well, and that enables relatively systematic processing of a large number of films, thus covering substantial time periods. Moreover, this kind of mid-range observation can help unravel patterns and similarities among films that, when focusing solely on style or stories, can appear very different – revealing them as similar when it comes to their potential memory impact. Finally, by engaging on a research path that focuses neither on stylistic features (as film studies would), nor exclusively on ideology (that is the primary concern of political science), but on an *intersection* of the two, the dissertation added to the rising interest in studying memory in a manner that is truly cross-disciplinary.

These theoretical and methodological contributions pave the way for further rethinking of the features that make film a relevant memory medium. By showing how remediation need not just be a tool for claiming primacy and authority in depicting history, Chapter IV opens up space to rethink this valuable concept. In other words, it points to how remediation can also be a tool to question precisely the claim to authority. On the one hand, I agree with Astrid Erll that remediation is a crucial process in shaping collective memory: as Chapter III demonstrates, the dominant narrative was also the result of continuous repetition of the same narrative across time, with characters varying only slightly and images reused again and again. The two films that embrace the dominant narrative, *Zapamtite Vukovar* and *Broj 55*, both remediate familiar imagery. In the case of *Zapamtite Vukovar*, it is the archival footage of the city. In *Broj 55*, the process is even more interesting, as it includes remediating not familiar footage of the war, but familiar style of those things that premediated the dominant war narrative as templates: Hollywood genre cinema and the image of the cool, rebellious soldier. At the same time, however, familiar images and details can also be remediated as a first step in deconstruction, the breaking down of the narrative they are supposed to support.

Chapter VI sketches, from the ground up and relying on rethinking available data, a novel way of thinking about the relationship between cinema and memory, pushing the boundaries of what a memory-relevant film could mean. While existing literature focuses predominantly on films which create memory (narratively and visually), it posits that there is value in considering also those films that do not create, but rather help maintain memory narratives. These films work in a way perhaps most similar to that of Nora's *lieux de memoire*, but in such a way as to include precisely the part Nora himself was skeptical about: the vividness and omnipresence of the narrativity that those places of memory support, refresh and contribute to. Nora's work relied on the premise that real memory no longer exists, and even if we could speak of sites of memory as places that activate narratives, those narratives could only be

artificial memory, prosthetics of some kind sitting in place of the real thing. But literature on the mediation of memory has in the last decades demonstrated very clearly that the distinction between “real” and “prosthetic” memory in this sense is a dubious one, and that mediated materials are not in a relationship of one-sided exchange with memory, pre-making patterns to be learned. Rather, the situation is much more complex, with media influencing memories and memories influencing media, and narrative schemes shaping both. Moreover, as Landsberg (2004) has shown, that something is prosthetic need not mean that it is not to be taken seriously. And in cases like Croatia, where collective memory of events is a “thick” memory environment, but also one in which the dominant narrative is constantly on the defensive, re-enforcing a particular narrative without retelling it can be an extremely powerful tool of keeping the status quo intact. However, the proposed idea of *films assuming the past* that I offer to rethink films as memory-makers would benefit from further conceptualization in the future, including studies concerning the ways texts “communicate” among themselves, but also the ways individuals dialogically communicate with texts as readers or, in this case, viewers. The same goes for the concept of *narrative ownership* I propose as a sensitizing concept in Chapter II. Derived bottom-up as an attempt to capture the way films include or exclude different characters from claiming the war experience as their own – and thus preserve the “us-them” divide between Croats and Serbs based on ethnicity years after the war has ended – it could be developed through exploring literature and film that observe the “us-them” distinction in a different context, primarily that of post-colonial memory.

Finally, the lingering concept that is central to this thesis is that of power, and how power infiltrates the memory dynamics. By focusing on observing the dynamic relationship between narratives over a 14-year period, this dissertation shifts the focus from politics as “the output of political institutions” (Müller, 2004, p. 2) to politics as everyday power negotiations involving “soft”, discursive power. Yet when it comes to memory in Croatia, the two are

sometimes hard to differentiate: the dominant memory that the films are observed in dialogue with is indeed the result of continuous narrative reproduction (thus soft power) – but it has been, for a very long time, also supported by political power-structures, including abuse of force to silence those who were vocal against it during the 1990s (see Chapter III). The same narrative has remained dominant, in fact so dominant that it continues to schematically influence even those narratives of the war that have for the last decade and a half been mostly free from direct political influence (as is the case with cinema). If anything, the Films Support Scheme run by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre (HAVC), based on decision-making through a system of Artistic Councils (in which appointed advisors assess received project proposals and recommend them for co-financing), has allowed – as this dissertation has shown – for a flourishing of both stylistically and ideologically very different projects.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, the most notable acts of censorship came from outside of the decision-making institutions, predominantly veterans’ associations and other war-related NGOs – but they too have often been brought into connection with governing structures through funding or sharing of similar political interests. While this dissertation thus affirms the role soft, discursive power plays in the memory processes, it opens further questions about the limits of discourse, and its ties to the more institutionalized power structures.

What arises from this dissertation with regard to power is the idea that the narrativity of memory is not simply interesting to observe; it also has serious political consequences. To observe memory through film might seem ephemeral for political science. But perpetuating the dominant memory – through whatever source – does not just keep a narrative alive: in Croatia, it also influences electoral results, shapes policies and even – as I show in Chapter III on the example of the government actors’ relationship to the ICTY – has the power to influence foreign

¹⁵⁴ This claim, however, remains only provisional. To fully evaluate the possible biases, a full analysis of both approved and rejected projects would have needed to be completed – a task that was sadly not possible, as HAVC does not store records of previous project applications. See also below.

policy. Historiography has already been placed under the critical eye from Benjamin to Foucault for being a tool of domination and spreading ideology as objectivity (Huysen, 2003, p. 5). Perhaps we should once again look critically at its underlying building block – narrativity. This dissertation reaffirms the idea that narrative can have a strong grip on memory artefacts in unpredictable ways. This is, in itself, far from novel: the power of narrative has long been recognized in other human sciences, researching how we shape our lives and construct meanings through borrowing and filling in familiar stocks of stories. Yet specifically in the Croatian case, a study of the narrative models that have helped shape the story of the war is still lacking. There have been a few valuable attempts to provide an analysis of individual media, e.g. Pavičić's (2011) study on stylistic models in post-Yugoslav cinemas since the 1990's and Vitaljić's (Vitaljić, 2013) analysis of still images. These works show how the story of the war was shaped at different time points. Works of authors such as Sabo or Senjković (Sabo, 2017; Senjković, 2002a) shifted the focus from one medium to processes of remediation across different media, focusing on specific symbols. Yet this dissertation points out that there is a need for a more systematic understanding of relationship between narratives and memory in post-war context, not just from the perspective of cultural studies or memory scholars, but political scientists as well.

7.2 Limitations and directions for further research

My findings concern the very specific Croatian post-war memory context. The choice to approach the data inductively at the first stage and with a limited theoretical framework in the second stage means that, while this approach gave me a detailed insight into the Croatian case, it connected relatively little with similar studies of other post-conflict areas. In other words, whereas the inductive approach allowed me to look at films in their memory-making potential, the analysis was not driven by theoretical assumptions derived from case-studies of other post-war memory contexts (or beyond). A more theory-driven approach would have likely

provided more generalizable insight, but at the cost of specificity and detail. I recognize this, however, not so much as a limitation as an opportunity for future research (see below).

Several limitations were present in the design and methodological approach of this study. In terms of design, the schematic narrative template/dominant narrative used for the analysis was constructed through secondary literature, rather than through analyzing original materials due to access, time and funding limitations. For instance, while print media materials are archived and available in Zagreb, there is still no digitalized archive; the TV news materials from the period – owned by the Croatian television (HRT) are to my knowledge still mostly not available to researchers. As the idea behind using the schematic template in the empirical work was to have a synthetic version of the political memory narrative for tracing the dialogues, this likely didn't dramatically influence the final results of the analysis. But as the process of tracing dialogical relationships depends on the researcher's familiarity with not just the narrative, but its various (re)constructions in different media, a more ground-up process to constructing the template would have likely been useful in the analysis stages.

The chosen research focus limited the research in a different way. The focus on narrative strategies of dialogue and a static means of observing them – the schematic template/dominant narrative model – meant that a number of assumptions went into the thesis that could have warranted further reflection. One, the model of tracing dialogicality in texts through time with a static narrative meant that, even if the changed circumstances in the background were taken into consideration, there is still little the thesis tells us about *why* this dynamic was as it was; were there specific political circumstances at certain points in time that created suitable environments for particular changes in narrative, or were there entirely different forces at play, and if so, which ones? My conclusion that there are no clear patterns in how certain critical narratives arrived — is thus open to contestation from approaches focused more closely on these kinds of dynamics. Two, while I observe how the core elements of the dominant (political)

memory narrative were negotiated in films, the focus on the war left certain topics unexplored (see e.g. the discussion on female characters below). Finally, and specifically in Chapter IV, my focus was on mapping narrative elements that were challenged by the filmic narratives, not on probing those that remained unchallenged. In retrospect, however, these elements might have been equally relevant, as they too reveal something about memory. Why was there such strong emphasis on perpetrator trauma in *Crnci*; how come *Korak po korak* could simultaneously promote a feminist agenda and criticize characters for being effeminate? More broadly, if the narrative (as a scheme) was so important, how did resistance to this narrative come to be at all? The way this project was designed simply did not enable me to answer these questions.

Other, more technical limitations were also present. My reliance primarily on digital sources in the process of collecting contextual information meant that selected journal articles were often chosen for their availability; digital online archives are notoriously unreliable (as media tend to redesign and lose data often), meaning media coverage was much easier to collect for the newer films (post-2010 period) than those made earlier. The same was true for institutional data, in particular for state institutions, a stronger focus on which would have made some of the points in this dissertation more robust. For example, little is said about the changes in the film funding processes since the 2000 and how these reflected on the films that were produced. While legislative changes are traceable, the inability to acquire and analyze materials concerning applications for and awarding of public funding at some stage of film project development meant that I relied on limited (mostly secondary) sources to back up claims about cinema's relative independence from direct institutional-political influence. While this is not central to this dissertation, some more insight into those dynamics would have strengthened the underlying assumption that the interest when studying films should be on the narratives themselves, rather than on processes of production and negotiations that precede them. The

point in the dissertation about the interconnection between HDZ and veterans' associations through various project-funding schemes, while not central to my work, would also have deserved more empirical backing. Yet state institutions' records on tenders are frequently unavailable (data is not always kept past a certain time point, and access is limited); moreover, their formatting as (usually) unsearchable pdf documents would have made the analysis simply too time-consuming for the given period. I have thus included only illustrative examples in the footnotes.

Other limitations to the study included occasionally limited access to film data. This meant that a few films produced in the observed period had to be dropped from the original dataset as they were not available for viewing, as well as that the observed time period was in the end shorter than initially planned. Practical difficulties in coding visual materials made the analysis often more difficult than expected; methodological literature was surprisingly unhelpful in this regard, and more active input on behalf of researchers coding and analyzing visual data is needed to pave the way for younger researchers. While it is by now widely accepted that research results depend heavily on the methodological choices and the analysis process, these processes are still rarely described in detail in published works.

Certain limitations, however, indicate the possibilities for further research. While the memory environments are not the same in other post-Yugoslav countries, some studies (Ristić, 2014; Zvijer, 2015) point at similarities in both memory mediation and the relationship between film and ideology; thus, this design would likely be interesting to repeat in those countries (this dissertation, in fact, started off as a comparative project). Moreover, in line with recent developments in literature pushing for abandoning the methodological nationalism which so often characterizes memory work (for both practical and other reasons), cross-country studies or comparative studies would be a welcome addition to understanding not only what films “do”

to their local dominant narratives, but how their interventions “travel” and are interpreted in different context.

To speak of a particular memory narrative (or myth) dominating the Croatian collective memory is by now commonplace in literature (e.g. Jović, 2017; Sabo, 2017; Sokolić, 2018). However, as posited above, despite the practical difficulties, value would be added to these discussions if a more systematic media analysis would be done re-tracing the process of narrativization, to supplement some already existing works (Benčić, 2015; Karačić et al., 2012; Kolstø, 2009; Pavlaković, 2008a) in better understanding how the narrative was shaped and shifted over time. Several archives – in particular the Open Society Archives in Budapest with their collection on the 1990s conflicts – would be a good place to start.

With regard to Croatian cinema, much has been written on the films of the post-war period (and in particular the 1990s) – so much that sometimes it can seem that both the research interests and the willingness of academic structures to invest in such projects have been thoroughly exhausted, replaced by more pressing issues. Yet the process of writing this dissertation has made it obvious to me how much there is still to be done. This is true of the painstaking work exploring the production context: as already mentioned, studies on the processes of film funding would help the field move away from assumptions and towards a thicker understanding of actual empirical contexts; documentation work with regard to production processes, script changes and even authorial intentions would help understand the finer nuances of stories coming to place, which could not be explored in detail in this thesis. Yet the need for more work is even more true in case of interpretive analyses treating films not just as potential memory narrators – as I do here – but also memory archives in their own right: studies concerning intertextuality in style across time, but also location, identifying influences that go beyond the (post-)Yugoslav context.¹⁵⁵ My own voice on this has been limited,

¹⁵⁵ For a recent study that tries to do this for a different time period, see Šakić, 2016.

attempting to make connections where they were the most obvious (see Chapter VI); but more systematic work is needed to make these arguments stronger: a reading of ‘Homeland War’ memory through genre, for example, would surely be a wonderful addition to the memory and film debate, requiring interdisciplinarity and opening perspectives.

Given that this thesis looks at cinema within a memory framework, the focus is on what film analysis adds to our comprehension of processes of remembering the recent past, and of the potential memory narratives they create – and not on the impact they have on the audiences. Collective memory studies do not always transfer seamlessly from studying texts to studying individuals (Olick, 1999). Audience studies often tend to eschew audiences for text analysis on their behalf (Kuhn, 2002). Yet to push the analysis further drawing on both disciplines – including through focus group discussions of the viewers’ engagement with the films on offer – would be a logical next step.

Finally, this thesis opens one question related to power and representation that is rarely discussed in the context of the ‘Homeland War’, namely that of gender. The dominant discourse of the war has been, from its creation, a male discourse: mostly created by men and featuring men (Sofos, 1996), even if women have occasionally been included as primarily mothers – of soldiers and of the homeland (Sofos, 1996) – or victims. In reality, women played many roles in the war: soldiers¹⁵⁶, victims of sexual and other violence¹⁵⁷, but also chroniclers and re-narrators of the war (Jambrešić-Kirin, 1996), objectors to nationalist policies and sources of multiple, very different stories (see Vušković & Trifunović, 2007). The war took on various meanings for them, but limited research shows a common perception of it as a “destructive and disintegrative event” (Stanić & Mravak, 1998), and not an experience of heroism and victory.

¹⁵⁶ To my knowledge, there is no definitive data on the number of women who participated in the war as soldiers, but one estimate places it at about 5% of the total soldiers, thus 23080 women; see Bradarić, 2011.

¹⁵⁷ It is estimated that there were between 1501 and 2437 victims of sexual violence during the war (*Assessment of the number of sexual violence victims during the Homeland War on the territory of the Republic of Croatia and optimal forms of compensation and support to victims*, 2013, p. 40), among them both men and women.

Yet this bottom-up, everyday perspective has been notably absent from cinema just like from the dominant narrative. Among the analyzed films, hardly any take interest both in the everyday life during the war and in the role of the female characters within that period. The sole exception, which moves the war discourse away from the soldiers and places of destruction and into the everyday of a female protagonist – Biljana Čakić-Veselić's *Korak po korak* (2011) – was directed by a female director, one of the very few among all the films discussed. The methodology employed in this thesis did not allow for too much analysis with regard to the positioning of the female characters; yet a focus specifically on female characters and their role outside of the usual mother/victim dichotomy of the dominant narrative would be interesting to pursue in the future.

As final versions of the analysis chapters were being drafted, the media was filled with news bringing in more of the same things that inspired this thesis. In January 2018, a veterans' widows NGO had protested against the screening of the film *Ministarstvo ljubavi* (*Ministry of Love*) on Croatian Radio Television. They had, without having seen it, deemed the film offensive to the group; the Minister of Veterans' affairs publicly supported their request. And while I was finalizing the finer details in December, reports of the worst year for Croatian cinema in a decade were coming in. This was due in no small part to the major changes in the leadership of the Croatian Audiovisual Centre (HAVC) last year, following accusations of financial irregularities and pressure exerted by, among others, veterans' associations – triggered by their dissatisfaction over several (this time mostly documentary) projects touching on the 'Homeland War' that were granted funding by the agency. These two examples illustrate how cinema, memory and state institutions, as well as powerful societal actors, continue to be intertwined in Croatia. And while film narratives might not be the obvious place to look for the intersection of power (both soft and institutionalized), identity and memory – all central topics

to the discipline of political science – this thesis points otherwise, opening plenty of questions in the process.

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9 APPENDIX I

List of films constituting the primary data body (thematic analysis)

YEAR	TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCER
2001	Ajmo Žuti (Go Yellow!)	Dražen Žarković	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Holding	Tomislav Radić	Družba film Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Kraljica noći (The Queen of the Night)	Branko Schmidt	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Polagana predaja (Easy Surrender)*	Bruno Gamulin	Gama studio, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Posljednja volja (Last Will)	Zoran Sudar	Global film (HR) JLP (SAD)
	Sami (Alone)	Lukas Nola	Alka film
	24 sata: Sigurna kuća, Ravno do dna (24 Hours: Safe House, Straight to the Bottom)	Kristijan Milić (I.); Goran Kulenović (II.)	Interfilm Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
2002	Fine mrtve djevojke (Fine Dead Girls)	Dalibor Matanić	Alka film
	Ne dao Bog većeg zla (God Forbid Worst Things Should Happen)	Snježana Tribuson	Maxima film
	Potonulo groblje (Sunken Cemetery)	Mladen Juran	Interfilm Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT) Jadran film
	Preživiti u Riju (Hibernation in Rio)	Davor Žmegač	Maxima film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Serafin, svjetioničarev sin (Seraphin, the Lighthouse Keeper's Son)	Vicko Ruić	Maydi film i video Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Synchro, 2002
2003	Konjanik (The Horseman)	Branko Ivanda	Telefilm, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Infekcija (Infection)	Krsto Papić	Ozana film, nWave pictures, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Ispod crte (Under the Line)	Petar Krelja	Vedis, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Onaj koji će ostati neprimjećen (The One Who Stays Unnoticed)	Zvonimir Jurić	Propeler film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Svjedoci (Witnesses)	Vinko Brešan	Interfilm, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Tu (Here)	Zrinko Ogresta	Interfilm,

			Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Svjetsko čudovište (World's Greatest Monster)	Goran Rušinović	Mliječni put, Romulić, Jadran film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Gama studio
	Doktor ludost (Doctor Frantic)	Fadil Hadžić	Alka film
2004	Duga mračna noć (A Long Dark Night)	Antun Vrdoljak	Mediteran film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Družba Isusova (The Company of Jesus)	Silvije Petranović	Maydi film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	100 minuta Slave (100 Minutes of Glory)	Dalibor Matanić	FOS film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Jadran film
	Seks, piće i krvoproliće (Sex, Booze and Bloodshed)	Boris T. Matić (I.), Zvonimir Jurić (II.), Antonio Nuić (III.) -	-
	Slučajna suputnica (Accidental Passenger)	Srećko Jurdana	Inter film
	Ta divna splitska noć (A Beautiful Night in Split)	Arsen Anton Ostojić	Alka film
	Oprosti za kung fu (Sorry for Kung Fu)	Ognjen Sviličić	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
2005	Pušća Bistra	Filip Šovagović	Apsurdist film
	Što je muškarac bez brkova (What is a Man Without the Mustache)	Hrvoje Hribar	FIZ, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Vizije, HFS
	Dva igrača s klupe (Two Players from the Bench)	Dejan Šorak	Interfilm, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Maj film
	Što je Iva snimila 21. listopada 2003. (What Iva Shot on 21.10.2003)	Tomislav Radić	Korugva; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Lopovi prve klase (First Class Thieves)	Fadil Hadžić	Alka film
	Snivaj zlato moje (Dream on, my sweet)	Neven Hitrec	Interfilm; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
2006	Put lubenica (Melon Route)	Branko Schmidt	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Telefilm
	Duh u močvari (Ghost in the Swamp)	Branko Ištvančić	Interfilm
	Volim te (I love you)	Dalibor Matanić	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Trešeta	Dražen Žarković, Pavo Marinković	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Libertas (Libertas)	Veljko Bulajić	DDC
	Karaula	Rajko Grlić	Propeler film, Refresh Production, Vertigo/Emotion film, Sektor film, HRT, Yodi Movie Craftman, Film&Music

			Entertainment, Pioneer Pictures
2007	Armin (Armin)	Ognjen Sviličić	Maxima Film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Busse & Halberschmidt, Refresh Production
	Moram spavat', anđele (I Have to Sleep, My Angel)	Dejan Aćimović	D.A. Film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), RTVFBiH, Croatia film
	Živi i mrtvi (The Living and The Dead)	Kristijan Milić	Mainframe Production, Porta Produkcija, Olimp, Uma, HRT, RTVFBiH
	Pjevajte nešto ljubavno (Play Me a Love Song)	Goran Kulenović	Interfilm Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Kradljivac uspomena (The Recollection Thief)	Vicko Ruić	Filmska udruga Vizija, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Interfilm
	Pravo čudo (True Miracle)	Lukas Nola	Kinorama Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Hajde dan...prođi...	Matija Kluković	Focus Media
2008	Buick Riviera	Goran Rušinović	Propeler Film; Refresh Production (BA), Tradewind Pictures (DE), Platform Production (US), The Group Entertainment (US), F.A.M.E (UK)
	Kino Lika	Dalibor Matanić	Kinorama; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Porta Produkcija (BA)
	Nije kraj (Will Not Stop There)	Vinko Brešan	Interfilm; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), VANS (RS)
	Tri priče o nespavanju	Tomislav Radić	Korugva Film; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Iza stakla (Behind the Glass)	Zrinko Ogresta	Interfilm; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Ničiji sin (No One's Son)	Arsen Anton Ostojić	Alka film; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Radiotelevizija Slovenija
	Zapamtite Vukovar	Fadil Hadžić	Alka Film
2009	Čovjek ispod stola (The Man Under the Table)	Neven Hitrec	Interfilm; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Kenjac (Donkey)	Antonio Nuić	Propeler Film;

			MaNuFaktura (BA), Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Baš Čelik (RS), Film and Music Entertainment (UK), Zagreb Film Festival (HR)
	Metastaze (Metastases)	Branko Schmidt	Telefilm Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Refresh (BA), Lux film (RS)
	Vjerujem u anđele (I Believe in Angels)	Nikša Sviličić	Proactiva; Master Film, Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Blizine (Closeness)	Zdravko Mustać	Hrvatski filmski savez (HFS)
	Crnci (The Blacks)	Goran Dević, Zvonimir Jurić	Kinorama; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Ljubavni život domobrana (Love Life of a Gentle Coward)	Pavo Marinković	Alka Film; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	U zemlji čudesa (In the Land of Wonders)	Dejan Šorak	Interfilm; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Tivoli- Filmprodukcio (HU)
	Zagrebačke priče (Zagreb Stories)	Nebojša Slijepčević Matija Kluković i Goran Odvorčić Ivan Skorin Branko ištvančić Zvonimir Jurić Ivan Ramljak i Marko Škobalj Dario Pleić Igor Mirković Zoran Sudar	Propeler Film
2010	2 sunčana dana (2 Sunny Day)	Ognjen Sviličić	Maxima Film; Kinoelektron (FR), Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HR)
	Majka asfalta (Mother of Asphalt)	Dalibor Matanić	Kinorama; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Neka ostane među nama (Just Between Us)	Rajko Grlić	Mainframe Production; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HR), NP7 (HR), Studio Maj (SI), Yodi (RS) Potpora: Eurimages
	Šuma summarum (Forest Creatures)	Ivan-Goran Vitez	Kinorama; Propeler Film (SI)
	72 dana (72 days)	Danilo Šerbedžija	Inter film, Zagreb; Vans, Belgrade
2011	7sex7	Irena Škorić	Artizana film
	Ćaća (Daddy)	Dalibor Matanić	Kinorama

	Josef (Josef)	Stanislav Tomić	Alka Film
	Korak po korak (Step by Step)	Biljana Čakić Veselič	Interfilm
	Fleke (Spots)	Aldo Tardozi	Kinoteka
	Koko i duhovi (Koko and the Ghosts)	Daniel Kušan	Kinorama; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Kotlovina	Tomislav Radić	Korugva
	Lea i Darija (Lea and Darija)	Branko Ivanda	Ars Septima; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Zagreb film (HR), ArtRebel9 (SI)
2012	Cvjetni trg (Flower Square)	Krsto Papić	Ozana Film; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Halimin put (Halima's Path)	Arsen Anton Ostojić	Arkadena; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Studio Arkadena (SI), F.I.S.T. (BA), Radio-televizija Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine (RTVFBiH)
	Košnice (Hives)	Igor Šeregi Boaz Debby Michael Lennox Simon Dolensky Tomaš Kratochvil	Akademija dramske umjetnosti (ADU); NFTS (UK), Sam Spiegel Film and Television School (IL), FAMU (CZ), IFS (DE)
	Ljudožder vegetarijanac (Vegetarian Cannibal)	Branko Schmidt	Telefilm
	Noćni brodovi (Night Ships)	Igor Mirković	Studio dim; Bela Film (SI), Delirium Film (RS), Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Radiotelevizija Slovenije (RTV SLO)
	Sonja i bik (Sonja and the Bull)	Vlatka Vorkapić	Interfilm; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Zagrebačke priče vol.2 (Zagreb Stories vol.2)	Hana Veček Sara Hribar Aldo Tardozi Ivan Sikavica Josip Visković Radislav Jovanov Gonzo	Propeler Film; Restart (SI), Alka Film (HR), Film and Music Entertainment (UK)
	Larin izbor: Izgubljeni princ (Lara's Choice: The Lost Prince)	Tomislav Rukavina	Media Pro Audiovizual d.o.o.
	Pismo ćaći (A Letter to My Dad)	Damir Čučić	Hrvatski filmski savez (HFS)
2013	Hitac (One Shot)	Robert Orhel	Kinorama; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)

Kratki spojevi (Short Circuits)	Birthday – Hana Jušić, Sonja Tarokić Bomb – Dario Juričan Subtenant – Andrija Mardešić	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
Majstori (Handymen)	Dalibor Matanić	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
Obrana i zaštita (A Stranger)	Bobo Jelčić	Spiritus Movens; Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT), Kadar (BA)
Projekcije (Projections)	Zrinko Ogresta	Interfilm
Simon Čudotvorac (Simon Magus)	Petar Orešković	Alka Film
Svećenikova djeca (Priest's Children)	Vinko Brešan	Interfilm; Zillion film (RS) Potpora: Eurimages
Visoka modna napetost (Tension)	Filip Šovagović	Zona Sova
Kauboji (Cowboys)	Tomislav Mršić	Kabinet Koprodukcija: HRT
Nije sve u lovi (Not All About the Money)	Dario Pleić	Interfilm
Oproštaj (The Farewell)	Dan Oki	Udruga Kazimir
Šegrt Hlapić (The Brave Adventures of a Little Shoemaker)	Silvije Petranović	Maydi Film & Video
Šuti (Hush...)	Lukas Nola	Kinorama, HRT
Vis-À-Vis (Vis-À-Vis)	Nevio Marasović	Antitalent produkcija Koprodukcija: Copycat, Pinknoiz
Zagonetni dječak (The Mysterious Boy)	Damir Žarković	Kinorama Koprodukcija: Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT) Potpora: MEDIA - Slate (2007)
Djeca jeseni (Children of the Fall)	Goran Rukavina	Corvus film Koprodukcija: Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
Broj 55 (Number 55)	Kristijan Milić	Stanislav Babić, HRT
Duh babe Ilonke (The Little Gypsy Witch)	Tomislav Žaja	Formula film (HR) Koprodukcija: Knut Ogris Films (AT), Geyzer Film Production (MK), Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT) Potpora: Hrvatski audiovizualni centar (HAVC), Eurimages, ORF, Makedonski filmski fond, ÖFI, Filmstandort Austria (FISA), Grad Zagreb, Kulturelle Filmförderung des Landes Oberösterreich

	Iza sna (After the Dream)	Igor Filipović	Jamat produkcija; Interfilm, Embrio Production
	Ljubav ili smrt (Love or Death)	Danijel Kušan	Kinorama
	Sveci (Saints)	Ivan Perić	Dream Division / Odjel za vizije produkcija; Umjetnička akademija, Sveučilište u Splitu (UMAS)
	Trebalo bi prošetati psa (Walk the Dog)	Filip Peruzović	Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT)
	Vlog (Vlog)	Bruno Pavić	Umjetnička akademija, Sveučilište u Splitu (UMAS)
	Happy Endings	Darko Šuvak	Alka film (HR); Bunker
	Kosac (The Reaper)	Zvonimir Jurić	Kinorama (HR); Forum Ljubljana (SI)
	Most na kraju svijeta (The Bridge at the End of the World)	Branko Ištvančić	Artizana film (HR); Kinematografska kuća (RS), HEFT (BA), Dari films (FR), Hrvatska radiotelevizija – HRT (HR)
	Takva su pravila (These Are the Rules)	Ognjen Sviličić	Maxima Film (HR); Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HR), KinoElektron (FR), Biberche Productions (RS), Trice Films Skopje (MK)
	Zagreb Cappuccino (Zagreb Cappuccino)	Vanja Sviličić	Maxima Film; Hrvatska Radiotelevizija (HRT)