

“Ready for the Homeland” in Croatian media: Commemorations, victory, and foundation

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Abstract. This article analyses the media discourse surrounding the WWII fascist salute *Za dom spremni* (ZDS) in the aftermath of two national commemorations that took place in Croatia in spring 2020: Jasenovac and Operation Flash (*Bljesak*). In spring 2020 Zoran Milanović, the newly elected President of Croatia, adamantly criticized the presence of the salute, associated with the collaborationist Ustaša regime, at the two commemorations, calling for its removal and ban. This led to heated reactions from war veterans and politicians who considered Milanović’s actions unacceptable and offensive towards the memory and legacy of the 1990s war, which triggered a wider debate regarding Croatia’s post-war national identity. The object of the analysis is the discourse surrounding the salute as it emerges in opinion pieces published in weekly and daily newspapers in April, May, and June 2020. With the salute becoming an increasingly prominent part of negotiating national identity and tailoring political agendas, investigating how it is justified, disapproved or otherwise challenged in the media is an aspect that deserves more attention. Relying on insights from discourse studies, the article sheds light on various statements that (de)legitimize the salute and consequently particular actors and actions associated with it. With the help of semiotics of culture wider signification tendencies and dominant discourse(s) upon which the national self-description has been built are identified. The article contributes to scholarship on hate speech and contested symbols in the post-Yugoslav space and their (mis)uses in societies struggling with traumatic legacies.

Keywords: discursive strategies; semiotics of culture; *Za dom spremni*; WWII legacy; “Homeland War”

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Introduction

Mass media played a significant role in the breakup of Yugoslavia and the series of conflicts in the 1990s. Functioning both as an indicator of and a contributor to the crisis, media discourse helped redraw boundaries between the ethnic groups in conflict and the established legitimacy of their respective political leadership (Jusić 2009: 21; see also Kolstø 2009; Thompson 1999; Kurspahić 2003). Recent studies have shown that the importance of media in (re)articulating and negotiating national identity remains topical (see Sicurella 2020), while national commemorations relevant for Croatia’s memory culture and their media representations serve as the main arena for political struggles (see Pavlaković, Pauković 2019).

The purpose of this study is to investigate two such cases of (re)articulating Croatian national identity in public discourse surrounding the WWII Ustaša (plural Ustaše, from the Croatian word for insurgent)² salute *Za dom spremni* (‘Ready for the Homeland’) that marked two national commemorations, namely Jasenovac and Operation Flash, both introduced in more detail in the following section. The use of the salute at the two commemorations triggered heated debates concerning the legacy of WWII and the 1990s Croatian War of Independence,³ as well as the ways in which Croatian national identity should be envisioned. For the analysis of media discourse, I focus on opinion pieces published in April, May, and June 2020 in daily and weekly newspapers located along the political spectrum in order to account for different positions and attitudes.

As communism was collapsing in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, Croatia and the neighbouring Slovenia sought independence after failed attempts to reform the state as a confederation. Supported by the Yugoslav People’s Army, Serbs in Croatia tried to prevent these independence movements by force, which eventually escalated into a full-blown Serb-Croat conflict in Croatia, and later spilled into Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serbian leadership often cited the legacy of the Ustaša movement, glorified by some Croatian extreme nationalists, as proof of

² The fascist Ustaša movement functioned as a terrorist organization prior to WWII. The Ustaše established the Independent State of Croatia (NDH – *Nezavisna država Hrvatska*), a puppet state of Nazi Germany, after being brought to power by the Axis forces in April 1941. The regime was responsible for massive atrocities and the implementation of genocidal policies against Serbs, Jews, Roma, and Croatian antifascists.

³ The dominant war narrative refers to the war as *Domovinski rat* (‘Homeland War’); the term suffers from ideological saturation, which is why it will be put in quotations marks throughout the article. For a more thorough overview, see Catherine Baker’s *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* published in 2015. Another invaluable source is Dejan Jović’s book (in Croatian) *Rat i mit: Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj*, published in 2017.

Croatian fascism. However, it served more as a justification to occupy parts of Croatia with an ethnic Serb population, with many parallels to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Croatian Army eventually liberated much of the territory with military operations in 1995, resulting in a regional peace treaty (Dayton Accords) and the peaceful reintegration of all internationally recognized Croatian territory by 1998.

The cases analysed reveal a *discourse of victory and foundation* that underpins Croatian national identity, is claimed by various actors, and manifests as a collection of normalized texts that serve to model behaviour in relation to the 1990s "Homeland War" legacy. A semiotic interpretation of this dynamic is offered, based on Juri Lotman's concept of self-description (Lotman 2005[1984], 2009[1992]), understood here primarily as a mechanism of inclusion–exclusion (see Madisson 2016; Madisson, Ventsel 2016) that maintains the boundary between 'us' and 'them', and regulates the meaning-making sphere surrounding the 1990s war and Croatia's post-war identity.

The beginning of 2020 was marked by a political change when the centre-left former Prime Minister Zoran Milanović became Croatia's fifth President. While the presidential function in Croatia is mainly symbolic, it remains relevant for national commemorations that "provide a highly visible stage for political elites and other memory actors to perform the past and define their political agendas within that frame" (Pavlaković, Pauković 2019: 2). Political elites use WWII and the "Homeland War" to mobilize their voters; this is best reflected through annual commemorations that reproduce ideological cleavages in Croatian society. Two examples of this dynamic took place in late spring 2020 during the annual commemoration in Jasenovac that honours the victims of the concentration camp and the final breakout attempt of prisoners on 22 April 1945, and the celebration of Operation Flash (*Bljesak*) that marks the Croatian Army's liberation of Serb-occupied Western Slavonia in May 1995. Although commemorating two different wars, both events ended up being controversial due to President Milanović's reactions over the use of *Za dom spremni* (abbreviated below as ZDS).

The ZDS – the official salute of the WWII Nazi-aligned Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) – has been among the central symbols linked to the rise of nationalism; from its use during football matches (Brentin 2016), commemorative practices (Pavlaković, Brentin, Pauković 2018; Pavlaković, Pauković 2019), 1990s war veterans' meetings and commemorations (Damčević 2021), to wider debates concerning the regulation of hate speech and contested symbols related to WWII and the 1990s "Homeland War" (see Đurašković 2016; Blanuša, Kulenović 2018). The relativization of the salute by certain social actors and political parties lies in its ties with the Croatian

“Homeland War”, when it was used primarily by members of the Croatian Defense Forces (*Hrvatske obrambene snage* – HOS).⁴ The official “Homeland War” narrative,⁵ and the fact that the salute was not legally regulated during the 1990s war, has enabled this WWII fascist symbol to remain in public space to this day. The use of the salute is predominantly supported by individuals and parties advocating positions of the radical right and it has become an important element in negotiating national identity. Efforts to prevent the banning of the salute and other WWII symbols, as was recently done in Austria, are part of a multifaceted project engineered by political actors, namely the right-wing faction of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* - HDZ) and the more recently established Homeland Movement (*Domovinski pokret*),⁶ as well as extra-parliamentary ones such as war veterans’ associations. Their alleged objective is to “safeguard” the legacy and symbols of the “Homeland War” (see Čepo 2017; Petsinis 2022).

In this study I rely on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) elaborated by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl (Reisigl, Wodak 2009; Wodak 2011), a fruitful approach due to the relevance of the historical and socio-political context that is explicitly incorporated in the DHA as a key dimension of analysis. As emphasized by Pavlaković and Pauković (2019: 10), some of the relevant functions of war commemorations are their contributions to the construction of a political landscape and helping to define national identities. Accordingly,

⁴ The radical right-wing Croatian Party of Rights (*Hrvatska stranka prava* – HSP) created the HOS as a paramilitary force. As war was approaching, in July 1991 the party declared they were forming their own armed forces to defend the country since the Croatian authorities did not launch a general military mobilization. HOS soldiers used the ZDS as their official salute, sometimes accompanied by a Nazi salute, precisely in order to evoke the memory of the Ustaša regime and the NDH (see Veselinović 2019). In the years after the war, HOS veterans had difficulty securing war veteran status if they did not also serve in the Croatian Army after the HOS was incorporated into the official military in 1992–1993, and were fully recognized in a law passed in 2001. In the meantime, many of them enhanced their pro-Ustaša sentiments. See “Croatia’s 1990s Paramilitaries: From Government Critics to Collaborators”, accessible online at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/06/croatians-1990s-paramilitaries-from-government-critics-to-collaborators/>.

⁵ The dominant narrative about the Croatian “Homeland War” is framed as being a primarily defensive war, with the aim of not only saving the Croatian state, but also preventing the destruction of the Croatian nation (Pavlaković 2014: 19).

⁶ The Homeland Movement [DP in short] was officially established on 29 February 2020 by Miroslav Škoro, a former singer and TV-host. The top priorities of the DP were set as the following: (a) safeguarding of national and Christian values; (b) stricter control of immigration and tougher “law and order” measures; (c) revision of certain clauses in the legislation on minority rights (Petsinis 2022: 80).

Milanović's criticism of the salute at the above-mentioned commemorations triggered a conflict of meanings surrounding Croatia's post-war national identity. The commemorations consequently became sites of struggle over meanings and values that are being (de)legitimized through discourse and further transmitted to the broader public through the media. *How* those media representations are framed and communicated, as well as what historical texts and discourses they are linked with and refer to, are questions the DHA helps us answer (see Wodak 2009, and also Sicurella 2020 for the application of the framework in the post-Yugoslav context).

Theo van Leeuwen's (2007, 2008) strategies of (de)legitimation shed light on the type of justification employed in relation to the ZDS, such as references to authority (i.e. status and role or rules) or reference to value systems, which can serve an important purpose in the wider public's perception of the issue and how it should be addressed. In order to identify the dominant discourse(s) upon which the national self-description has been built, I rely on semiotics of culture that can assist in explaining wider socio-communicative functions of texts and signification tendencies. The concept of self-description allows me to highlight how different values surrounding the salute – sometimes even contradictory and inconsistent ones – can be unified into a coherent identity discourse in order to maintain the established self-image of a national community.

Semiotic objects – be it cultures, individuals, or collectives – describe themselves in order to maintain identity coherence and avoid heterogeneity (Lotman 1990: 128). Some examples of those descriptions include national laws and regulations, declarations, manifestos, school curricula, as well as national commemorations as performative descriptions. National commemorations dedicated to events considered as formative for a given nation, such as wars, are particularly potent when it comes to (re)producing national identity and maintaining boundaries between 'us' and 'them' due to a heightened capacity to trigger cultural memory. President Milanović's reactions to the presence of the salute at the two commemorations disrupted the semiotic homogeneity surrounding the legacy of WWII and the "Homeland War", consequently leading to different actors' attempts to contest or reestablish it. Accordingly, the main problem of the present article can be articulated as follows: how is the ZDS framed in the selected media texts following Milanović's criticism at the two commemorations? The guiding research questions are: (1) What are the salient discursive strategies and strategies of (de)legitimation surrounding the ZDS? (2) What are the dominant discourse(s) upon which the national self-description has been built? (3) And, lastly, what is the discourse of victory and foundation like and how is it related to self-description?

As commemorative events and symbols are highly relevant for Croatia’s political life, this study sheds light on the media messages communicated to voters in the context of the first months of Milanović’s presidency. Based on the analysis of selected media texts published in the aftermath of Milanović’s actions, I found four main ways in which the salute was articulated: (1) the ZDS as a symbol of heroism of the “Homeland War” defenders, i.e. veterans of the 1990s war; (2) the ZDS as part of an ongoing political battle, (3) the ZDS as defensive, i.e. as defending the legacy of the “Homeland War”, (4) the ZDS as unacceptable.

With the above in mind, it is important to state that the discourses surrounding the ZDS are not exclusively about the salute; they are also inevitably related to the qualitative evaluation of problems and implications that the salute quantifies, such as Croatia’s WWII and “Homeland War” legacies. The two-sided feature of the salute – a contested symbol⁷ on the one hand and nationalistically motivated hate speech on the other hand – presents an increasingly relevant research object due to its capacity to trigger a wide range of meaning-making practices tied to remembrance, nation-building, and identity construction (see, for example, Brentin 2016; Blanuša, Kulenović 2018).

In the first section I provide background to the two commemorations and their importance for Croatian post-war national identity. In the second section I present the theoretical framework and clarify my choice behind combining the DHA and Van Leeuwen’s strategies of delegitimation with semiotics of culture. The third section presents the design of the study and provides justification for the selected material. In the analysis that follows I identify four dominant themes and highlight discursive strategies surrounding the ZDS in the selected media texts. In the fifth section I focus on the *discourse of victory and foundation* that structures collective national identity upon which Croatia’s self-description has been built. Lastly, I discuss the implications of the presented discursive strategies and signification tendencies for framing the issue of the salute and conclude with considerations for future research.

⁷ Following the lines of Lotmanian semiotics, I consider the salute as a symbol and therefore a mechanism of cultural memory. Within this context, a symbol appears as a “semiotic condenser” that plays the role of a mediator between different spheres of signification (Lotman 1990: 111).

Jasenovac and Operation Flash

The Jasenovac commemoration takes place annually at the Jasenovac Memorial Site, and honours the victims of the concentration camp and the final breakout attempt of prisoners on 22 April 1945. After coming to power on 10 April 1941, the Ustaša began establishing concentration camps for enemies of the state defined by racial laws modelled on those operating in Nazi Germany. The largest camp was located near the village of Jasenovac, and the number of victims has remained one of the most controversial aspects of the political debates regarding the nature of the camp (Pavlaković, Pauković 2019: 12–13). Tens of thousands of Jews, Roma, Serbs, and Croatian antifascists were killed there and at neighbouring sites (Mataušić 2003).⁸ The ZDS was the official salute used by the Ustaše in various documents and declarations that embodied the Ustaša regime.

When it comes to WWII, political elites and citizens are sharply divided about who fought for Croatian national interests: the collaborationist Ustaše, or the communist-led Partisans, who restored a (federal) Yugoslav state under Josip Broz Tito. The Jasenovac commemoration aptly demonstrates the existence of those rival communities of remembrance and it can be divided into a few relevant aspects. The rehabilitation of the Ustaše during the 1990s, enabled by the policy of “national reconciliation” under Croatia’s first president Franjo Tuđman (see Pauković 2012; Pavlaković 2014; Đurašković 2016), was subsequently challenged precisely through the annual Jasenovac commemoration. Namely, Jasenovac was part of the post-Tuđman governments’ strategy to reaffirm antifascism as part of EU values (Radonić 2014). The Jasenovac Memorial Site staff has been collaborating with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum since 2002, while in 2005 Croatia became a member of the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, with Jasenovac as the most relevant site of Holocaust memory (Pavlaković 2019: 123). Furthermore, in 2006 the Jasenovac Memorial Site opened a new permanent exhibition that was supported by politicians across the mainstream political spectrum (see Pavlaković 2018).

According to Pavlaković (2019: 124), the annual Jasenovac commemoration achieved national significance after former Prime Minister Ivica Račan began attending the commemoration in 2003, followed by President Stjepan Mesić the following year. The politicians’ engagement, combined with the research

⁸ The Jasenovac Memorial Site Museum’s website currently lists 83,145 victims of different nationalities; the information can be accessed at <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6711>. Scholars estimate that the number is likely as high as 100,000. It should be noted that the number of victims varies among scholars in Croatia, Serbia, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Yad Vashem; it continues to be debated by politicians and revisionists.

conducted by the scholars at the Jasenovac memorial site, led to the establishment of the official narrative that countered both radical Croat and Serb nationalists. The radical right in particular had continuously minimized the numbers of victims at Jasenovac, while radical Serb nationalists had perpetuated the myth of nearly a million dead Serbs; both myths maintain followers among nationalist and revisionist politicians, journalists, and historians, as well as members of the Catholic and Serb Orthodox Churches (Pavlaković 2019: 124).

Since 2016, the official Jasenovac commemoration was boycotted by Croatian Serb associations, antifascists, and the Jewish community almost every year; they organized numerous counter-commemorations as well as protests in Zagreb (Pavlaković, Pauković 2019: 13). This was due to claims that the centre-right governments led by the HDZ encouraged historical revisionism of WWII, which led to the rise of right-wing extremism and anti-Serb sentiment, most notably reflected in the increased presence of the ZDS in various public spaces.⁹ One such event took place in November 2016, when former members of the Croatian Defense Forces and right-wing politicians installed a memorial plaque that featured the Ustaša ZDS salute near the Jasenovac memorial site. While the plaque was subsequently moved to nearby Novska, it took the government almost a year to do so, which sparked both local and international criticism (see Damčević 2021). President Milanović’s comments after the Jasenovac commemoration in 2020 that the memorial plaque “should be removed, thrown away somewhere” and that “it has nothing to do with the Homeland War”¹⁰ sparked a backlash from many veteran groups, including those that had no direct ties to the HOS.

Although the commemoration of Operation Flash, celebrated in Okučani every 1 May, is overshadowed by the Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day related to Operation Storm on 5 August, it has become more significant over the past two decades. The military action carried out by the Croatian Army in the spring

⁹ For instance, some politicians from the current HDZ government, along with the former President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović – who comes from the same party – often glorified war criminals as national heroes, which contributed to the rise of extremism and historical revisionism. Moreover, crimes of the WWII Ustaša regime have been downplayed by prominent politicians while the ZDS continues to be openly used among radical right nationalist individuals and groups. While the HDZ has taken the shape of a more classic Christian Democratic party in contemporary Croatia, the HDZ’s politics of history has been characterized by the ideology of ethnic nationalism that was particularly prominent in the early 1990s (Koren 2019).

¹⁰ “Zoran Milanović o HOS-ovoj ploči: To treba maknuti, baciti negdje [Zoran Milanović about the HOS plaque: That needs to be removed, thrown away somewhere].” N1 info Hrvatska, 22.04.2020, can be accessed online at <https://hr.n1info.com/vijesti/a502649-zoran-milanovic-o-hos-ovoj-ploci-to-treba-maknuti-baciti-negdje/>. Translations from Croatian are by the author of the article, K. D.

of 1995 liberated Serb-occupied territories of Western Slavonia in less than three days (Pavlaković, Pauković 2019: 19). Operation Flash boosted Croatian morale for the subsequent military offensives that took place later in 1995. The annual commemoration emphasizes the contribution of the “Homeland War” defenders (*branitelji* in Croatian)¹¹ who were wounded and lost their lives in the Operation.¹² As a reaction to President Milanović’s comments about the ZDS in Jasenovac, some veterans decided to wear shirts with the Ustaša salute during the official Operation Flash commemoration in May 2020. This provoked Milanović into leaving the commemoration since this was, as he claimed, a degradation of the victims and the memory of the event.¹³

These two commemorative case studies reveal how the ZDS blurs the narratives of both WWII and the “Homeland War”, and has the power to create political scandals as well as reinforce existing social and political polarizations. While the ZDS, along with other Ustaša symbols, has been used on monuments, in public discourse, in graffiti and popular culture for years, this case study is relevant because it involved the President, i.e. the head of state, who openly criticized the salute, whereas the previous President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović had considered the salute “a historical phrase” and relativized its presence and use.

¹¹ Commonly referred to as ‘*branitelji*’ or ‘defenders’, war veterans of the 1991–1995 “Homeland War” are considered as the embodiment of the Croatian war narrative of sacrifice, defence, and victimhood, and are often referred to as the creators of Croatia in political and media discourse (Fisher 2005[2003]; Jović 2017; Sokolić 2019). *Branitelj* status is regulated by the Act about Croatian Defenders from the Homeland War and the Members of their Families which was initially passed in 2004 and amended in December 2017, October 2019, and most recently in July 2021, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_07_84_1556.html (accessed on 5 May 2022). Article 3 defines a *branitelj* as an “individual who participated in the organized defense of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia as a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia” or as an armed member of the *Narodna zaštita* (National Defense), initially created by the HDZ in 1991 as a civilian organization in order to assist the government amid rising tensions with the Yugoslav People’s Army (*Jugoslavenska narodna armija* – JNA). War veterans of the 1991–1995 “Homeland War” in Croatia maintain a high position in society and politics, first and foremost in terms of their central relation to (and in) the war narrative (see Jović 2017; Sokolić 2019).

¹² Another military operation – Operation Storm (*Oluja*) – was carried out by the Croatian army in the summer of 1995, with the same aim of regaining control over parts of Croatia held by the separatist Serb minority since 1991. Prior to, during, and after the operations, a majority of the ethnic Serbs fled the country. Operations Flash and Storm symbolize the end of the Croatian War of Independence in popular discourse.

¹³ “Incident u Okučanima! Milanović zbog natpisa ZDS otišao obilježavanja Bljeska! [Incident in Okučani! Milanović left the commemoration of Bljesak because of the ZDS inscription!].” N1 info Hrvatska, 01.05.2020, can be accessed online at: <https://hr.n1info.com/vijesti/a505185-incident-u-okucanima-milanovic-zbog-natpisa-zds-otisao-s-obiljezavanja-bljeska/>.

Theoretical framework

Power is a central concept in the DHA and it is assumed that it is constantly legitimized and de-legitimized in and through discourse; accordingly, texts are approached as potential sites of struggle (Reisigl, Wodak 2009; see also Van Leeuwen, Wodak 1999). Due to the understanding that texts and discourses are always linked to other texts and discourses, both in the past and in the present (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 90), context is crucial in the DHA. The concept of 'context' takes into account the following levels:

- (1) the immediate, language or text-internal co-text and co-discourse;
- (2) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
- (3) the extralinguistic social variables and institutional frames of a specific 'context of situation';
- (4) the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 93).

The framework that helps to identify the discursive strategies surrounding the ZDS is built upon three dimensions developed within the DHA: (1) the identification of salient contents, i.e. themes and topics; (2) the investigation of the discursive strategies; and (3) the analysis of how these strategies manifest themselves as linguistic realizations (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 93). By 'strategy', the authors refer to "a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal" (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 94). While the authors present five discursive strategies,¹⁴ I choose to rely on two: *nomination*, or the discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events and processes/actions, as well as *predication* that focuses on qualities attributed to social actors, objects/phenomena/events and processes/actions. Those strategies are of particular relevance for this study since they shed light not only on how the ZDS is constructed in discourse, but also on evaluations and positive or negative traits (e.g. expressed as adjectives, prepositional phrases, allusions, metaphors, etc.) associated with it (Reisigl, Wodak 2009).

¹⁴ (i) nomination, or the discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events and processes/actions; (ii) predication, i.e. what qualities are attributed to them; (iii) argumentation, i.e. justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness; (iv) perspectivization, framing or discourse of representation; and (v) intensification and mitigation, which identify whether the force of utterances is augmented or reduced (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 95).

At this point I find it necessary to mention the normative implications of relying on the DHA. One of the goals of the approach is to take a normative stance towards the chosen research object and the discursive practices that accompany it. For instance, Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 6) state that agents who communicate some form of discriminatory discourse need to be held accountable for their statements and researchers should not absolve them by pathologizing their practices. In this article, however, my approach is primarily motivated by the need to identify and understand the wider signification of the tendencies related to the ZDS salute in the selected media texts rather than provide explicit criticism and evaluation of its use. As such, my focus relies on the competence of cultural semiotics that studies interpretative frames and dominant meaning-making hierarchies. However, I acknowledge that my position inevitably influences my research object and analysis and I think that more concrete action – such as the development of formal and informal educational initiatives tackling hate speech and extremism in a post-conflict context – should be taken in order to mitigate the proliferation of related tendencies in Croatian society. Lastly, while I think that the ZDS salute has no place in the public regardless of circumstances, prohibition alone is not helpful if there are no long-term efforts by educators, political elites, journalists, religious community leaders, and other social actors who are willing to engage in an open and constructive dialogue about contested symbols, as well as the narratives that shape and fuel them.¹⁵

While I do identify examples of content-related argumentation schemes (topoi and fallacies) advanced by the DHA, I decided to complement it by relying on a more thorough approach to the discursive construction of legitimation. By doing so, I wanted to open my research object further and identify linguistic strategies that can be used to justify or delegitimize certain social practices (Van Leeuwen 2007, 2008), in this case, the public use and presence of the ZDS salute. According to Van Leeuwen (2007: 92), the four main categories are “(1) *authorization*, i.e. legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested; (2) *moral evaluation*, i.e. legitimation by reference to value systems; (3) *rationalization* that refers to legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action; and (4) *mythopoesis*, i.e. legitimation conveyed through exemplary narratives”. These categories can occur separately or in combination with each other.

Lastly, I rely on semiotics of culture in order to identify dominant discourse(s) upon which the national self-description has been built. Principles outlined by the DHA approach – most notably pluri-perspectivity, intertextuality and

¹⁵ Ustaša symbols are not banned in Croatia despite existing efforts to do so.

interdiscursivity – go hand in hand with semiotics of culture. Ensuring an insight into multiple perspectives regarding the ZDS enables me to bring forth the relevance of conflicting meanings for the generation (or hindrance) of new meanings and the acceptance of diverse views. To do so, I rely on the notion of self-description, which brings me to the question why it is relevant and how it contributes to investigating (de)legitimation in this study.

Lotman's notion of self-description helps identify processes of separation and exclusion within a given semiotic space (such as a culture or a society). Self-description brings about a centralization and hierarchization of the semiotic space, during which one of its languages or structures occupies the centre and starts to function as a metalanguage/metastructure (Lotman 2005[1984], 1990). The self-description then establishes a criterion for the inclusion of elements in the internal semiotic space, excluding any that are not translatable in terms of the established metalanguage/metastructure (Lotman 1990; Monticelli 2012: 66). More simply put, self-description determines the boundary of culture, helps avoid heterogeneity and maintain identity coherence (Lotman 1990: 128). Uncovering dominant discourse(s) associated with the ZDS in the selected media texts helps pinpoint different values associated with the salute and determine how they contribute to the reinforcement of a particular national self-description. Moreover, the principle according to which texts and discourses are always linked to other texts and discourses in the past and present, points towards the importance of the mechanism of cultural memory in maintaining and triggering particular narratives relevant for a national community and, consequently, for preserving dominant self-descriptions.

Design of the study and the material

My initial data set included 30 media texts – mostly opinion pieces – about the ZDS published in different daily and weekly newspapers between 22 February and 18 June in the year 2020, following Milanović's election as President of Croatia. I identified the relevant opinion pieces based on the title or skimming through the text in case the title did not reveal sufficient information. While further constructing my final sample, I focused on pieces that had been published shortly after the commemorative events introduced above and in which the ZDS was discursively most salient. Finally, the sample was downsized based on where the ZDS featured most prominently, which ultimately resulted in nine media texts published in April, May, and June 2020 being selected.

In what follows, I outline the main steps taken in order to design the study. First, I predominantly opted for opinion pieces as a relevant genre of media

texts: out of nine texts, seven are opinion pieces, one is a report following the aftermath of Milanović's statements, and one an interview with the President of the Croatian Generals' Association.¹⁶ I follow Sicurella's justification behind relying on the *opinion piece* – namely, that the genre allows authors “to publicly express their viewpoints and thus establish themselves as legitimate and authoritative ‘speakers’ for certain social entities or groups” (Sicurella 2020: 69). This can, in turn, inevitably influence how a given issue is perceived by the public.

The reasoning behind choosing printed material was primarily practical for it is easier to collect and more permanent than audio-visual data. I also follow Mautner's (2008) considerations that were further adopted by Sicurella (2020) in the analysis of print media in the post-Yugoslav space. Two of these are particularly relevant for the study at hand, namely, print media “tend to reflect a social stream, which makes them valuable sites to study dominant discourses”, and “they are disseminated to large audiences, which amplifies their power to promote shared constructions of reality” (Sicurella 2020: 70).

Second, I chose the ZDS salute as my case study due to its intertwinement with post-conflict nation-building narratives and the fact that it is often instrumentalized by various actors in order to further specific political agendas, such as maintaining one-sided interpretations of the “Homeland War” (see, for example, Jović 2017; Blanuša 2017; Cvijanović 2018; Koren 2019). This is particularly evident in the context of national commemorations, and specific examples I bring forth in this study illustrate the relevance of commemorative events as an arena of political struggle. The selected opinion pieces aim to illustrate the broader context the ZDS is part of, which corresponds to the theoretical approaches introduced above.

Third, I selected newspapers located at different points of the political spectrum to reinforce further the DHA principle of pluri-perspectivity; this means inclusion of newspapers that communicate different cultural and political attitudes (Sicurella 2020). I have selected two daily newspapers (*Novi list* and *Večernji list*) and two weekly newspapers (*Hrvatski tjednik* and *Novosti*). *Novi list* is a regional daily newspaper published in the city of Rijeka and it is considered to have a centre-left leaning. *Večernji list* has been in the ownership of the Austrian media group Styria Medien AG since 2000 and its political orientation is conservative. It was

¹⁶ The Croatian Generals' Association (*Hrvatski generalski zbor* - HGZ) was founded on 7 November 2005 as an association with goals such as promoting the Croatian military thought and tradition, scholarly research of the “Homeland War”, the protection of the dignity and reputation of the “Homeland War” *branitelji*, the promotion of Croatian national traditional and fundamental values upon which the Croatian Republic was founded, as well as collaboration with other organizations in Croatia. More information (in Croatian) is available at <https://hrvatskigeneralskizbor.hr/povjesnica-hgz-a/>.

the leading state-owned daily in socialist Croatia. *Hrvatski tjednik* was founded in 2002 and until 2013 it was published under the name *Hrvatski list*. Published by TEMPUS d.o.o. (a private limited company), it is considered an obscure, radical right-wing¹⁷ newspaper that publishes affirmative pieces about the WWII Ustaša regime. *Novosti* is an independent weekly newspaper published since 1999 by the Serb National Council; initially it was distributed through the network of Serb organizations, but since 2009 it has become available to the wider public. *Novosti* focuses on events considered significant for the Serb community while providing an often critical and satirical commentary on political and social events in Croatia and abroad. Many non-Serb authors and journalists from *Feral Tribune*, the main opposition weekly in the 1990s, also contribute to *Novosti*.

I would like to point out that this is not a reception study and I do not attempt to measure the potential effects particular media texts may have on audiences. Lastly, and given my limited material, I do not make generalizations based on the conducted analysis, as my main focus lies on interpreting the discursive strategies and signification tendencies identifiable in the selected media texts.

Analysis: Discursive strategies surrounding *Za dom spremni*

1. The ZDS as a symbol of heroism of the “Homeland War” *branitelji*

A report in *Večernji list* regarding the aftermath of Milanović’s statement that the HOS plaque should be “thrown away somewhere” locates the symbolic conflict arising between what the President articulated as “the heroism of the 1990s Homeland War and the criminal nature of the NDH”. Renata Rašović and Božena Matijević (2020: 8) report on the subsequent reactions of some veterans’ organizations that strongly condemned Milanović’s statement, characterizing it as “continued negative actions from certain institutions that do not respect the Homeland War or the Homeland War Declaration”.¹⁸ The reference to the “Homeland War Declaration” is a reference to a formative text for Croatia’s postwar national identity: an institutionalized text that calls for an unambiguous acceptance

¹⁷ In Croatia, constituent characteristics of the radical right include “an emphasis on the Ustaša movement during the Second World War, the creation of a strong state with an authoritarian character, territorial expansion of Croatia to its ethnic borders, especially vis-à-vis the Serbs, and a messianic mission of the Croatian nation as a bulwark of Catholic Christianity” (Obućina, 2012: 3).

¹⁸ Available online in Croatian at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2000_10_102_1987.html.

from “all Croatian citizens” regarding the war as “solely just and defensive” (NN/2000; see Koren 2011 for a thorough analysis of the political uses of the Declaration). The implication here is that the criticism of the salute also entails the criticism of the “Homeland War” and the enshrined Declaration that reinforces a one-sided foundational narrative of the republic. This reveals mythopoesis and the Declaration as the story about heroic deeds and actors, namely war veterans, that carries the function of restoring the perceived legitimate order surrounding the war legacy.

War veterans are constructed as social actors whose heroism, especially “their contribution in the defense and creation of Croatia” (Rašović, Matijević 2020: 8), has been deeply offended by Milanović’s statement. The discursive qualification of veterans as heroes and *branitelji* is crucial here; Croatia’s *branitelji* are considered as the embodiment of the Croatian war narrative of sacrifice, defense, and victimhood and are often referred to as the creators of Croatia (see Fisher 2005[2003]; Pavlaković 2014; Jović 2017; Sokolić 2019).

The references to heroism and defense may further underpin broader narratives of victimization by mobilizing contextual knowledge shared by the readers and generated through cultural memory. In that context, the *branitelj* is conceptualized as “the potent actor which *defended*, and thus facilitated the rebirth of Croatia by unselfishly sacrificing on ‘the altar of the Fatherland’” (Soldić 2009: 23). Seeing the *branitelji* as ‘creators of Croatia’ who were ‘deeply offended’ reinforces the association that Croatian war veterans are one collective body with an unambiguous perception of the war and their role therein, while the qualification ‘creators’ reinforces their mythical status and implies that they, as such, can claim ownership of the Republic.

The thematic element (Jović 2017) of offence and defence is further prominent in an interview in *Večernji list*, given by Pavao Miljavac, the president of the Croatian Generals’ Association. The Association was one of the organizations that felt provoked by Milanović’s statement in Jasenovac, which resulted in a voluntary renunciation of membership by Andrija Hebrang¹⁹ that was allegedly caused by the lack of the Association’s public condemnation of the President’s “shameful act” (Rašović 2020a: 9). According to Miljavac (2020: 9), however:

¹⁹ Andrija Hebrang, a Major General of the Croatian Army Reserves, renounced his membership by stating that the Association had abandoned its principles by notifying him that it will not publicly react to what he considers the worst defamation of a legal defenders’ HOS unit by President Zoran Milanović (<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/ogorцени-hebrang-dao-neopozivu-ostavku-na-clanstvo-u-generalskom-zboru-odbili-su-osuditi-milanoviceve-protuustavne-klevete-branitelja-10266556>).

The president is quick to pull the trigger, he states something that he does not feel will cause polemics, but on the other hand he is defending some of his own positions since he comes from the left [of the political spectrum, K. D.], so it is understandable that he will not be comfortable with ‘*Za dom spremni*’ nor the arm raising, and he also has an obligation to defend it since the Constitution states that the Croatian state was founded upon antifascism, not other symbols.

Two forms of delegitimation can be detected here: the first, in which Miljavac supports Milanović’s condemnation of the salute by referring to the authority of his presidential status and ideological orientation, as well as the authority of the Constitution, and second, by reference to value systems, i.e. the antifascist foundations of Croatia. By looking favourably upon the President’s reaction, Miljavac’s statement bears a clear evaluative meaning. The idiomatic expression ‘quick to pull the trigger’ used in the beginning also functions as an evaluative attribution connoting negative personality traits exhibited by the President, such as impulsiveness.

However, in a later section Miljavac advances a normative claim by which he characterizes Milanović’s statement as “harsh”, therefore implying the desirability of appropriateness and politeness since “anyone who defended Croatia deserves piety and respect” (Miljavac 2020: 9). The use of the pronoun ‘anyone’ as a qualification serves an equalizing function reinforced by a normative term ‘deserving’, as being worthy merely by virtue of “defending Croatia” no matter the affiliation or cost, which strengthens the discursive qualification of war veterans as heroes. He reinforces his view of appropriateness by stating: “If I were in such a situation, I would bow to the victims and then say what needed to be said. But he [the President] is like that, temperamental, he considered those T-shirts [containing the salute] a provocation, which it is since those boys [at the commemoration] were never in the HOS and he is the Commander-in-Chief” (Miljavac 2020: 9). Through the use of nomination, namely the deictic expressions ‘I’ and ‘he’, Miljavac attempts to establish the position of someone who would do the appropriate thing in comparison to the President. As such, his claim also carries a normative connotation expressed in the phrase ‘say what needed to be said’ as the implied *right* thing to do. He reinforces the aforementioned statement by characterizing the President as *temperamental*, which implies a level of irrationality and lack of control. Miljavac (2020: 9) goes on to say:

I think it [the salute] is a part of history and that it should remain as such. Death and battles occurred under that salute, let it stay that way, but in history. I think it is not good to rehabilitate it in the modern Croatian state. [...] I do not deny that there were deaths under that salute, but that should be left to historians, I think we have much more important topics in society.

Two forms of delegitimation can be detected in the quoted passage. Firstly, there is delegitimation by reference to the value systems reflected in the ‘modern Croatian state’, and, secondly, delegitimation by reference to the authority of experts, concretely historians. The general sentiment communicated in the quote is that of letting the past be the past; this is reinforced by directing attention in the last sentence to more pressing issues in the country (later defined as the Covid-19 crisis and related economic challenges). Miljavac does acknowledge that (HOS, K. D.) soldiers died under the salute – thereby implicitly assigning it a level of legitimacy – but rejects the thought of rehabilitating the ZDS in the “modern Croatian state”. The adjective ‘modern’ evokes associations of civilizational values upon which Croatia was built, such as antifascism.

2. The ZDS as part of an ongoing political battle

“Croats did not take long to return to the slaughter between Ustaše and Partisans. Politics once again opened the old trenches of WWII” (Despot 2020: 11). Zvonimir Despot starts his opinion piece in *Večernji list* with an allusion to war and frames the ZDS as part of a political battle between two ideological positions. The implication here is that Croatian society – but first and foremost politics – are stuck in the past, while Milanović and his followers on the political left focus on “excavating bones” and “digging out the past” (Despot 2020: 11). This personification, based on the metaphor of ‘nation as body’, carries a strong connotation of leaving the dead to rest in peace and of politicians as violating the sanctity of burial and not letting the past be the past. Despot (2020: 9) notes that “the fact that nothing is holy for them [the politicians], that they also abuse the dead for political gains, that they also dig through the bones together with Milanović, none of that seems to matter. I guess all of this is in the interest of the Croatian people.” Deictic expressions are prevalent in this excerpt, namely ‘them’ and ‘they’, which are epistemically more advantageous for promoting Despot’s position on the matter and implicitly asserting his authority as an author. This is reinforced through the use of the phrase ‘the Croatian people’, which constructs Croats as devoid of agency and therefore largely depersonalized. The active verbs ‘abuse’ and ‘dig’ further connote Croatia and the Croatian people as being subjected to the aims and interests of politicians.

In his opinion piece, also published in *Večernji list*, Marinko Jurašić locates the salute within the frame of a political battle. He refers to Milanović as ‘a political beast’ and the salute as part of the battle between two major political parties – the centre-right Croatian Democratic Union and the centre-left Social

Democratic Party of Croatia (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske* – SDP) – in the period preceding parliamentary elections. The use of ‘a political beast’ functions as an evaluative attribution of positive traits reflected in the hyperbole ‘beast’ that reinforces culturally constructed associations of masculinity and strength. Positioning the issue of the salute within a political arena is reinforced by the phrase ‘political decision’ to strengthen associations with political moves and strategies surrounding it. By characterizing Milanović’s actions at the two commemorations as “inappropriate from a country’s president”, Jursić (2020: 7) advances a moral evaluation by referring to Milanović’s previous position as Prime Minister by stating: “It is also hypocritical that he [Milanović] kept quiet about the HOS symbols while he was Prime Minister [...]” (Jursić 2020: 7). The reference to Milanović’s former status is situated around the use of the evaluation ‘hypocritical’ to describe his failure to take a stance against HOS symbols in the past, which is an attempt to discredit his actions in the present. However, this strategy is fallacious as its purpose is to discredit the other party rather than tackle their argumentation, in this case regarding the President’s lack of initiative when he served as Prime Minister. Jursić (2020: 7) continues:

The President’s coming forward in Jasenovac and Okučani liberated the “genie” in the bottle and now, on every occasion, he will face the consequences of his request to ban any use of the ZDS, even in the context of HOS symbolism. Of course, the President has the right to express his stance [...], even more so since during his presidential campaign he swore to respect the Constitution and laws, while as the Commander-in-Chief [of the Croatian Armed Forces] he does not have the right to criminalize symbols of a legal unit from the “Homeland War” nor the feelings that many cultivate towards those who gave their lives for the homeland under those symbols.

In the first sentence, Jursić characterizes Milanović’s actions at the commemorations as a regrettable, irreversible act by using the idiom ‘genie in the bottle’. This is reinforced by a vague phrase that the president will ‘face the consequences’ of his request to ban the use of the ZDS, while not clarifying what the alleged consequences might be. By remaining enigmatic, Jursić creates a sense of risk and danger, which from an argumentative perspective constitutes a *topos of threat and danger*, i.e. something will happen if the President does not act differently. This could further be regarded as a *slippery slope* type of fallacy since the author does not demonstrate the alleged inevitability of said consequences. The use of the adverb ‘even’ implies that it would be extreme to ban the ZDS in the context of HOS symbolism, which subtly leads to an attempt to legitimize the salute by reference to custom, i.e. the use of the ZDS as part of HOS symbolism.

In another opinion piece published in *Večernji list*, Renata Rašović (2020: 9) starts with a rhetorical question: “If not politics, why don’t the *branitelji* themselves confront the ZDS?”, thereby shifting agency from politicians to war veterans in an attempt to distance the issue from the political arena but still framing it as part of a battle reflected in the use of the verb ‘confront’. Rašović (2020: 9) writes that after its removal, “the HOS plaque was barely mentioned for three years, while the ghosts of Ustaše and Partisans marched into history where they belong, until one simple sentence coming from the state leadership and from the mouth of President Zoran Milanović breathed new life into them”, which resulted in a “schizophrenic situation”. While it is not explicitly stated, this is an insinuation of blame directed towards Milanović that supports the idea of him as the one responsible for the heated reactions related to WWII Ustaša insignia. The use of the adjective ‘schizophrenic’ in order to describe the situation following Milanović’s statement qualifies it as contradictory, scattered, chaotic, which is strengthened by a reference to mental illness. The articulation of blame is made more explicit later, when the journalist criticizes the SDP government of the early 2000s (which Milanović was a part of) that legalized the HOS’s insignia containing the salute,²⁰ “while subsequent governments failed to tackle the issue” (Rašović 2020: 9). The phrase ‘failed to tackle’ triggers associations with politicians being unable to provide a constructive and long-term solution regarding the ZDS. Rašović continues and delegitimizes the salute by reference to external authority as well as value systems by appealing to defenders:

To explain to them [the subsequent governments, K. D.] that by insisting on – a legalized! – salute as insignia of the troops [HOS, K. D.] is causing irreparable damage to Croatia, for which they [HOS, K. D.] were ready to give their lives, while allowing continuous warnings that we are receiving from Vienna, Bruxelles, and even Belgrade, consequently allowing the notorious Vučić to lecture Croatia on morality. (Rajović 2020: 9)

In the excerpt above, Croatia emerges as a weak actor on the international stage as regards its war legacy, while the use of ‘irreparable damage’ implies Croatia’s liability to be marginalized by external forces as a result. Rašović ends her appeal with an explicit reference to Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vučić; by using the adverb ‘even’ along with the adjective ‘notorious’, she alludes to Vučić and his

²⁰ The aspect of legality has been a debated issue. Namely, the application to register the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS) Association of Soldiers – that included the coat of arms with the inscribed ZDS salute – was approved by the then Ministry of Justice and Public Administration in 2001 and during the SDP government (see <https://direktno.hr/direkt/podsjetimo-racanov-ministar-odobrio-je-za-dom-spremni-u-grbu-udruge-hos-a-193446/>).

politics as wildly inappropriate and unacceptable as any form of moral compass for Croatia,²¹ advancing a claim of a normative nature.

The ZDS as part of a political battle gains another dimension – as a battle with the legacy of Croatia’s first President – in an opinion piece by Jerko Bakotin (2020: 12) in *Novosti*, aptly titled “*Zombi tuđmanizma*” (‘The Tuđmanism zombie’):

Is it possible – and if so, to what degree – to counter Ustašism by referring to Tuđman [Croatia’s first president, K. D.]? [...] Even if it is possible to separate the HOS soldiers who died while defending Croatia – as hot-blooded young men – from Ustašism, the HOS was ideologically most certainly a neo-Ustaša formation. [...] it was precisely Tuđman who enabled the rehabilitation of the Ustaše [...] In doing so he equalized legitimate desires towards independence with a ‘state’ proclaimed by a group of terrorist killers and – by mentioning ‘geographic boundaries’ – supported an Ustaša-like Greater Croatia. [...] He [Tuđman, K. D.] defined his condemnation of the NDH as a primarily pragmatic rather than a value-based one. To a degree, he did the same with the HOS: Tuđman partly attacked them because he held the opinion that they did not understand geopolitical reality, and not because of their ideological essence. How is it possible to counter Ustašism by referring to Tuđman, if ‘Tuđmanism’ contains an Ustaša component? The realpolitik maxim is, then, to attack Ustašism by emphasizing Tuđman’s anti-Ustaša component, as was done by Milanović.

The use of the noun ‘zombie’ in the title sets the tone for Bakotin’s opinion piece and characterizes the political ideology of “Tuđmanism” (i.e. Croatia’s first President Franjo Tuđman) as the living dead – to put it more explicitly, as a corpse that is occasionally reanimated through political use. Bakotin develops his argument around a rhetorical question: “Is it possible, and if so to what degree, to counter Ustašism by referring to Tuđman?” He poses the question in response to Milanović’s follow-up on the backlash regarding his criticism of the salute, in which the President condemns the NDH by referring to Tuđman’s criticism of the HOS. However, as Bakotin states, Tuđmanism contains elements of Ustašism since Tuđman enabled its rehabilitation by equalizing “legitimate desires towards independence with a ‘state’ proclaimed by a group of terrorist killers” (Bakotin 2020: 12). Bakotin uses the pejorative nomination ‘terrorist killers’ to describe the Ustaše and the ideological anthroponym ‘Greater Croatia’ to foreground the assigning of blame to Tuđman and his relativization of the NDH – which extends to Milanović and his contemporaries and keeps coming back (i.e. like a zombie). While Bakotin’s commentary does not explicitly raise the question of the salute,

²¹ For a recent and thorough treatment of the politics of memory in Serbia, see the book *The Politics of Memory of the Second World War in Contemporary Serbia. Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution* by Jelena Đureinović (2021).

one strategy of delegitimation by reference to historical authority – Tuđman – dominates throughout. Bakotin reiterates his question before proceeding to characterize the current state of affairs by using a political principle ‘realpolitik maxim’ to delegitimize Tuđman’s treatment of the Ustaša legacy and Milanović’s reliance on Tuđman’s practical – rather than value-based – condemnation of the NDH.

3. The ZDS as a defensive symbol

Ivica Marijačić’s (2020: 5) opinion piece in *Hrvatski tjednik* poses a rhetorical question in the title: “Aren’t we at least a bit ashamed that we are leaving our country in the hands of lunatics?” A partially normative claim can be detected here, reflected in the use of the deictic plural ‘we’ and the adjective ‘ashamed’ that triggers associations of guilt concluded with the pejorative plural noun ‘lunatics’. By alluding to mental illness, he adds an element of pathologization of the national body and, in doing so, suggests that Croatia is trapped in its disability. By evoking strong emotions such as shame and guilt, Marijačić directly condemns any criticism of the salute and writes that “every Croatian needs to protect the ZDS salute unconditionally – not only because it is the legal symbol of one part of the victorious Croatian Army – but because Serbia is trying to break Croatia’s back by means of [banning, K.D.] the salute.” An ‘us’–‘them’ dichotomy is established here between Croatia as victorious and heroic *versus* Serbia as the enemy and perpetrator. The author uses strategies of legitimation by reference to the authority of law (salute as ‘legal’) and by reference to value systems as reflected in the use of the adjective ‘victorious’ Croatian army. The normative claim that “every Croatian needs to protect the ZDS salute unconditionally” is articulated as an obligation and reinforced with the use of the adverb ‘unconditionally’.

In the second part of the sentence, Marijačić reinforces the construction of Serbia as the enemy through the use of the metaphor ‘nation as body’ (“Serbia is trying to break Croatia’s back by means of the salute”). This fuels the narrative of Croatia’s victimization while the metaphor carries a strong moral connotation by constructing the relationship between Serbia and Croatia solely on the basis of animosity and the victim–perpetrator framework. This representation is further developed when Marijačić (2020: 5) writes that:

[...] the salute has become an ideal medium for breaking Croatia’s back. Serbia is doing so in plain sight – through the mediation of Milorad Pupovac and his organizations and newsletters, Serbian Orthodox Church, the non-governmental sector, anti-Croatian newsletters, and so-called antifascists.

The author’s attempt to demonize critics of the salute consists of positioning Serbia as the external enemy and, in part, utilizing a narrative of victimization²² that also includes internal enemies, which carries the connotation of betrayal. Serbia and Serb-associated actors – such as Milorad Pupovac, the leading Croatian Serb politician – and organizations in Croatia are constructed as internal enemies that are gradually destroying Croatia by means of the ZDS, while repeating the phrase ‘breaking Croatia’s back’ represents Croatia as passive and ultimately left paralyzed as a victim of the alleged enemy (perpetrator) actions. The author conceives of Croatia as a perpetual victim of Serbian aggression, while Serbia and Serb-associated actors and organizations are framed through ‘negative Other’ representation. By directly referring to Pupovac as a mediator of the attempts to destroy Croatia from within, Marijačić implicitly qualifies him as a traitor. The use of the adjective ‘so-called’ when referring to antifascists is employed so as to invalidate them and imply a level of pretense. By reinforcing the position of Croatia as if only ever the victim, the author attempts to solidify the ZDS as defensive. The implication here is that as a victim, Croatia is framed as passive but also innocent, which further serves the overarching purpose of legitimizing the salute.

The theme in which the ZDS is constructed as defensive and, accordingly, legitimized is more explicit in the opinion piece titled “*Za dom spremni*” or professors in the wastelands of the Croatian Constitution – those who are bothered by HOS’s, Thompsons’s²³ and Croatia’s salute, are also bothered by the Croatian state” (Borić 2020: 24). The dominant and overarching element present in the title is the implication of treason and the relativization of the ZDS by locating it primarily in Croatia’s contemporary context. The author, Gojko Borić, attempts to construct himself as a political and moral guide in order to both establish himself as an authority and to undermine experts’ opinions on the matter rather than critically assessing them. He emphasizes: “[...] I think that it [ZDS] belongs to history, regardless of whether the NDH and/or the HOS’s coat of arms are in

²² A decade of war in the former Yugoslavia resulted in immense human losses and material destruction, as well as monumental levels of traumatization among the population. This in turn “contributed to a widespread and generalized sense of victimhood on all sides of the conflict” (Sisson 2010: 172; see also Schäuble 2014). There are many implications of narratives of victimhood, such as the formation and proliferation of victimhood nationalisms and their role in international politics (see Lerner 2019 and Williams 2008).

²³ The controversial singer Marko Perković Thompson – probably the most influential nationalist in Croatian popular culture – became famous during the 1990s war with his song “*Bojna Čavoglave*” (“Čavoglave Battalion”). The song starts with the chanting of the ZDS salute, followed by Thompson’s singing that Serb enemies will not enter his village as long as Croats are alive. On this topic, see: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/03/croatian-court-rules-thompson-song-did-not-break-law/>.

question, meaning that it can only be mentioned as a memory of ancient times and that it has nothing to do with Croatia's present and contemporary political reality" (Borić 2020: 23). Here, the author seemingly delegitimizes the salute by a vague reference to the authority of custom and tradition. However, this soon becomes a contradiction in terms, as Borić (2020: 23) writes the following as continuation to the previous sentence:

Besides, Croatian professors should be clear that certain words and sentences can have different meanings and interpretations regardless of their sameness, and accordingly, the Ustaša ZDS is not the same as the HOS's and Thompson's ZDS because they appeared and were used in completely different historical circumstances [WWII and the 1990s war]. The official NDH '*Za dom spremni*' salute should be completely rejected, with almost everything that was connected with the Ustaša regime, while the HOS's ZDS salute inscribed on their coat of arms, as well as its [the salute, K. D.] mention in Thompson's song is something completely different, namely a cry that the HOS fighters used when they entered into battles for the liberation of Croatia, and Thompson used to encourage his listeners in their patriotic enthusiasm.

While remaining subtle, in the first part of the sentence that includes the prominent nomination 'professors' the author condescendingly attempts to assure his authority over the issue of the ZDS. By framing it within legitimation by reference to theoretical rationalization – a sub-strategy of rationalization based on an alleged truth about "the way things are" (Van Leeuwen 2007: 103) – Borić makes a claim that he communicates as "common knowledge". Namely, he writes that, based on the use in different historical contexts, the meaning of the Ustaša ZDS and the ZDS as used by HOS units and the singer Thompson is not the same. This is an example of a fallacy wherein the content of the author's argument – the appeal to the "use in different historical contexts" – lacks any substantial follow-up that would pose an actual argument that can be tackled.

Further, the salute is framed in the context of 'the liberation of Croatia' and the reinforcement of 'patriotic enthusiasm' through Thompson's music. At the same time, the author writes that the official NDH salute should be rejected "with almost everything that was connected with the Ustaša regime". The implications of the aforementioned fallacy are the following: the salute was stripped of its existing meaning tied to the NDH and the Ustaša regime; therefore, the sole meaning of the ZDS that should be acknowledged is the one tied to its use in the "Homeland War". In addition to neglecting the fact that HOS members used the salute during wartime with the aim of evoking the NDH Ustaša regime – making the salute's meaning inseparable from the NDH – (see Veselinović 2019), the author also omits

insight into the role that Thompson’s music carried in reinforcing nationalism and polarization (see Baker 2010).

4. The ZDS as unacceptable

The fourth main theme that emerges from the analysis is the characterization of the ZDS as unacceptable under any circumstances which thereby expresses an explicit normative stance. This theme features prominently in Tihana Tomičić’s opinion piece in *Novi list*, which she starts by adamantly praising Milanović’s reaction and consistency in condemning the salute: “[...] first, the ZDS salute should not be a part of anything, especially not a state protocol. And, secondly, it is nice to see Milanović being consistent in something, especially something that is so politically correct” (Tomičić 2020: 2). This is a strong example of delegitimation by reference to authority, most notably custom (‘state protocol’). Delegitimation of the salute is strengthened through the reinforcement and explicit support of Milanović’s statement, which is also a reference to his perceived authority as the President. Tomičić furthers a normative claim by characterizing Milanović’s statement as politically correct, which is an evaluative attribution reflected in the dichotomy ‘right’–‘wrong’, ‘correct’–‘incorrect’. Consequently, Tomičić leaves no space for ambiguity that might imply that the salute could be used in certain circumstances. She challenges the commonly raised claim regarding the legality of the salute:

The key question here is, why nowadays the HOS has the right to such insignia. This is a political decision of a certain governmental authority since the registration of organizations is carried out by the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. And that has been a political decision of every government to date, since the HOS’s insignia was not revoked by Milanović while he was Prime Minister and while his people managed the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration; neither has it been revoked by Andrej Plenković now that he is Prime Minister and his people are managing the Ministry of Public Administration. Neither of them did this – each for their own reasons. (Tomičić 2020: 2)

The use of the nomination ‘political decision’ implies the political actors’ covert strategy behind choosing how to deal with the salute and the WWII Ustaša legacy more widely. This is reinforced in Tomičić’s last sentence regarding both Milanović and Plenković having “their own reasons” for not taking action. The governments – and specifically Milanović and Plenković as crucial political actors – are consequently blamed for the current state of affairs surrounding the salute by having failed to revoke the HOS’s insignia that has enabled the political right-wing faction to use the ZDS under the pretense of honouring a military unit from the “Homeland War”. As pointed out by Hansson, Madisson and Ventsel (2022: 1),

the discursive construction of blame is employed with the purpose of portraying “some actor as deserving blame or being blamed for having intentionally caused a negative outcome or for violating a norm”. The authors further emphasize that blaming can be an important means of political persuasion. For instance, blaming someone might have an underlying intention of changing the behaviour of the person(s) being blamed, but also of inviting various audiences to take the side of the person who is creating the blame (Hansson, Madisson, Ventsel 2022: 6). As a consequence, “blaming may affect the formation of public policy agendas as well as the institutional structures and communicative behavior in government” (Hansson, Madisson, Ventsel 2022: 6; see also Hinterleitner 2020).

Another evaluative attribution comes to the fore when Tomičić (2020: 2) writes that the “*Za dom spremni* salute should be permanently banned in every form because it is an NDH relic and regardless of its use after 1945, it is equally dirty as it was during the NDH Ustaša regime.” The use of the adjective ‘dirty’ is an important choice of wording; the anthropologist and cultural theorist Mary Douglas provides an insightful contribution to the study of pollution and taboo and argues that “some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” (Douglas 2002: 3). She deems this the expressive function of pollution, which makes the choice of ‘dirt’ in the current example allude to a contaminated dimension of Croatia’s social and political reality.

In his opinion piece in *Večernji list*, Zvonimir Despot (2020: 11) also argues that the ZDS is unacceptable in today’s context due to it “not having any historical continuity aside from the Ustaša one” and “because it was used in the NDH, specifically in the initial stages of the regime that carried out the persecution of ‘undesirable’ individuals”. Delegitimation is embodied in an appeal to temporal continuation that presupposes positive continuity between Croatia’s past, present, and future. This is further expressed through two prominent forms of delegitimation: *authorization* and *rationalization*. Authorization – or delegitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, and law – is reflected through locating the salute within a specific temporal window (1941–1945) and denying it any subsequent continuity or legitimacy, which in turn frames it as a rupture therein. It is relevant to note here that Despot performs the role of a spokesperson for the nation by appealing to national history; this can carry the function of attempting to educate the national community and/or promote/defend its identity (Sicurella 2020). Despot then proceeds by delegitimizing the salute by reference to “the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity” (Van Leeuwen 2007: 92) – something that has come to be known in the society. This is emphasized through delegitimation by reference to the authority of expertise when he writes that:

All of that [the persecution and liquidation of “undesirable” individuals, K. D.] was accompanied with the ZDS salute. A witness to this is the subsequent documentation regarding the persecution and liquidation of people, where the Ustaša authorities use the salute. It is actually terrifying nowadays, after a series of historical facts, to lead this senseless discussion about the Ustaša salute that does not and cannot have any place in Croatia’s present and future! It is especially unacceptable to consider the ZDS as a universal salute from the Homeland War and a salute used by Croatian defenders! It was never the case! (Despot 2020: 11)

The consistent use of nomination in the quote is framed within delegitimation by reference to expertise and historical data, where the author adamantly rejects any scenario of the salute’s presence and use. By specifically referring to the documentation about crimes committed against people during the Ustaša regime, Despot implicitly appeals to sources produced by experts such as historians, which further reinforces delegitimation of the salute. By using the adjectives ‘terrifying’ and ‘senseless’ to describe ongoing discussions surrounding the salute in contemporary Croatia, he emphasizes Croatia’s present and future, while implying that the place of the salute can only be in the past.

Discourse of victory and foundation and the national self-description²⁴

The previous section presented the main themes and discursive strategies arising from the selected media texts regarding the ZDS salute. This section focuses on the underlying discourse of victory and foundation that structures collective national identity upon which Croatia’s self-description has been built and is being consistently reinforced, with the ZDS becoming a significant element therein. Yet what is the discourse of victory and foundation and how is it related to self-description? In post-conflict societies the so-called “cultures of victory” can be divisive, which is prominent in the context of Croatia. As Boduszyński and Pavlaković (2019: 2) write, this is because “the nature of ‘victory’ in a war of secession leading to independence is destined to play a central role in the creation of narratives about a new state’s birth”. What takes place in turn is further solidification of victory narratives as key parts of foundational myths, school curricula, memorials, and related remembrance practices.

The semiotic relevance of post-conflict identity creation lies in what Lotman (2009[1992]) explains as the “post-explosive” moment during which the chaos

²⁴ I consider it relevant to point out that I present one aspect of the Croatian national self-description, which means it is not representative of the said self-description as a whole.

and diversity of communicative processes are ordered in autocommunicative self-description. While I will not delve into a deep analysis of the concept of cultural explosion as it is beyond the scope of this paper, I will use it as a basis for further clarification of self-description since I consider it particularly fruitful for making sense of post-conflict meaning-making and mapping processes of change. Namely, a cultural explosion can be defined as a disruptive change in the state of a particular system, i.e. culture. In the context of this paper, war and conflict are paradigmatic examples of a cultural explosion because of an overwhelming dynamic of signification practices, both on the level of re-negotiation and re-hierarchization of existing meanings, as well as the creation of new narratives, symbols, customs, and rituals (Lotman 2009[1992], see also Lorusso 2015). A cultural explosion can last for months or years, depending on whether it takes place within one cultural layer (e.g. politics or language) or all cultural layers. Accordingly, the end of a war does not mean the end of a cultural explosion itself, since a culture's eventual restoration of stability can take time due to the complexity of evolving systems of meaning.

So what exactly is the goal of a given culture during the post-explosion stage? It is to create a new self-description, which fulfills at least three functions: (1) to establish a boundary between the internal and external semiotic space; (2) to trigger the centralization of the semiotic space; and (3) to regulate the inclusion of different – often perceived as non-fitting – elements into the internal semiotic space (Lotman 1990: 123–214; 2009[1992]). In the context of the 1990s “Homeland War” the listed functions correspond to: (1) the creation of the ‘us’–‘them’ dichotomy in which Serbia takes the position of the enemy and the Other; (2) the centralization of the semiotic space, i.e. the Republic of Croatia, reflected in the domination of languages and structures that occupy the centre and start functioning as the metalanguage/metastructure (Lotman 2005[1984]; see also Monticelli 2012 as well as Makarychev, Yatsyk 2017) – in this case concerning the discourses surrounding the “Homeland War”; and (3) the regulation of elements perceived as not belonging in the internal semiotic space, i.e. within the established discourses about the war.

The discourse of victory and foundation upon which the national self-description has been built was constructed during the post-explosive stage when teleological relations were established with the war. From an external observer's perspective, and when employing a retrospective view, wars come to be perceived as destiny and the only possible outcome (Lotman 2009[1992]: 123–132, 2013). All other potential scenarios – especially those deemed unfitting for the newly established national self-image – are eliminated or marginalized. In the case of Croatia's discourse of victory and foundation, WWII legacy and the 1995 Operation Flash served as some of the most crucial elements for the formation and ultimate institutionalization of the war narrative as victorious and defensive.

Before observing the discourse of victory and foundation more closely, it is necessary to point out different tendencies that a culture may have; namely, a tendency towards eccentric culture and concentric culture. An eccentric culture functions as a system of rules and has a tendency towards oppositions such as ‘organized’–‘non-organized’ as its basis (Lotman, Uspensky 1978: 219). Furthermore, in an eccentric culture the boundary between the inner and outer structures is gradual; a self-description of that kind is characteristic of cultures that are open to external contacts and communication (Lotman 2010[1970]). In comparison, a concentric culture functions as a collection of normalized texts where the boundary between inner and outer structures is rigid. In this kind of self-description, cultural changes are interpreted according to a binary logic; they can be perceived as bringing either prosperity or disaster (Lotman 2009). Within this dynamic, the tendency of self-description is towards separation from the space/elements that are perceived as threatening; in this context, the discourse of victory and foundation that perceives the enshrined war narrative as the sole legitimate one.

Victory and foundation

What may be the relevance and implications of the discourse of victory and foundation in relation to the ZDS in the context of this study? To answer this question, I need to redirect attention to the role of *foundational legitimacy* that rests on the “purity” of the established discourse and, consequently, the war narrative. Foundational legitimacy can be defined as “a hegemonic narrative about the way in which a new state was created and the role particular groups played in its creation” (Boduszyński, Pavlaković 2019: 2). This narrative is claimed by various actors, such as politicians and war veterans who enjoy power and privilege as a result of their ties to the “Homeland War”, as illustrated in the analysed media texts. As a crucial part of the post-conflict national self-description, the discourse of victory and foundation manifests as a collection of normalized texts – such as the *Homeland War Declaration* and national commemorations – that carry a regulatory function in relation to the war legacy and model behaviour in order to maintain the ideal self-description.

What is the role of the ZDS in the discourse of victory and foundation? On the level of a symbol, the ZDS carries information related to past contexts that can be “triggered” when the salute is placed in a contemporary context (Lotman 1990; see also Lotman 2019[1985]: 139–148). When that happens, a transformation of meaning inevitably takes place and this transformation is an interplay between the

languages of the past and the present (Lotman 2019[1986]: 144). When a symbol has a rather simple texture – such as the ZDS does – it possesses a greater signifying capacity (see Turner 1987) and a greater capacity for cultural memory from the perspective of semiotics of culture (Lotman 1990; Lotman 2019[1986]: 143). This means that, while symbols can indeed take up additional meanings in different contexts, their existing meaning does not simply disappear; rather, the meanings co-exist and can be triggered in yet another communicative context. In the case of the ZDS, this dynamic has largely been preserved since the “Homeland War” when HOS units and right-wing actors used it to evoke the Ustaša legacy (Veselinović 2019), consequently reinforcing its existing meaning. As a simple symbol, the ZDS was able to become a part of the post-war national self-description built upon the discourse of victory and foundation and manifested through various communicative contexts such as football, national commemorations, popular culture, and political elections, among others.

The analysed media texts illustrate the variety of meaning-making tendencies that the salute can facilitate as part of the performative dimension of the national self-description – i.e. ideal self-image – such as commemorative events rituals. Accordingly, the articulation of the salute as (1) a symbol of heroism; (2) a part of political battles; (3) a symbol of defense; and (4) unacceptable, brings to the fore another relevant feature. Namely, the existing political fragmentation over the past – and the salute specifically – functions as a reflection of memory entrepreneurship; groups or individuals that are influential in the creation and reproduction of historical narratives. Within this dynamic, political elites are “those who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one interpretation or narrative of the past, engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise” (Jelin 2003: 33–4; see also Bernhard, Kubik 2014; Pavlaković, Pauković 2019). In the context of “cultures of victory” this dynamic becomes even more prominent. Any efforts to challenge the self-description based upon the discourse of victory and foundation are seen as a threat to the privileges that groups such as war veterans and politicians who espouse the dominant self-description enjoy (Boduszinsky, Pavlaković 2019). This type of self-description also influences the ways in which society relates to Otherness by making the latter seem as a threat rather than a potential partner in communication (Puumeister 2018: 106). This in turn may lead to fewer opportunities for the generation of new meanings, a process for which the presence of difference is essential (Lotman 1981: 5).

Conclusion

The present study was carried out with the aim of identifying the discursive strategies and wider signification tendencies surrounding the ZDS salute in selected media texts commenting on the Croatian President's reactions to the use of this fascist symbol in the spring of 2020. To do so, I combined the DHA approach and Van Leeuwen's strategies of (de)legitimation with semiotics of culture. While the former approach helped me shed light on how the salute was framed and (de)legitimized, the latter revolved around identifying dominant discourse(s) upon which the post-conflict national self-description has been built.

I applied this framework to a selection of opinion pieces published in the aftermath of two national commemorations relevant for Croatia's national identity after gaining independence: the Jasenovac commemoration and the commemoration of Operation Flash. The significance of focusing on the aforementioned is two-fold: firstly, in the year 2020 the centre-left former Prime Minister Zoran Milanović became Croatia's fifth President and, secondly, he adamantly criticized the presence of the ZDS in the context of the above commemorations. This led to a backlash from war veterans and politicians, being perceived as an attack on the memory and legacy of the "Homeland War".²⁵ On the other hand, public opinion also reacted positively to Milanović's uncompromising stance on the ZDS and other Ustaša symbols. He was praised by the moderates and the left frustrated with ongoing far-right provocations that have been tolerated by Plenković's ruling HDZ.

The four main themes identified in the analysis of selected media texts, namely the salute as (1) a symbol of heroism; (2) a part of political battles; (3) a symbol of defense; and (4) unacceptable, have demonstrated the divisive role that WWII symbols play in Croatian society and politics. How this particular issue is framed

²⁵ Another instance occurred on 10 April 2022 during an event in the Dalmatian city of Split that commemorated the 31st anniversary of the foundation of the "Knight Rafael Boban" battalion – one of the most publicly active HOS units. In addition to the attendees chanting the ZDS, the envoy of the Ministry of the Croatian Veterans Matko Raos stated that "there would not be today's Croatia were it not for 10 April 1941", suggesting that the modern Croatian state had direct ties to the NDH (*Novosti*, 11 April 2022). The statement led to the backlash of minority organizations that had already requested that more concrete action should be taken against the use of the ZDS. More particularly, around a year earlier representatives of the Jewish Community Zagreb had asked the Government to modify the Criminal Code and qualify the use of the ZDS as felony punishable with imprisonment. However, no initiative was taken by the Government, which resulted with the President of the Jewish Community Zagreb, Ognjen Kraus not joining the official Jasenovac commemoration in April 2022. In the meantime, the Government started talks with representatives of minority organizations and antifascists about the possibility of tightening existing sanctions regarding the ZDS (Godeč, 23 April 2022).

in media discourse is an aspect worth exploring further in order to shed light on different political messages communicated to wider audiences and on the ways in which they influence public perception of a given matter (Entman 1993; Sicurella 2020). This in turn may affect political behaviour and voter turnout, especially in the context of “cultures of victory” such as Croatia where many leading politicians develop their agendas largely around WWII and “Homeland War” legacies.

The current study opens up different venues for future research. Firstly, research could consider tackling the ways in which media texts – and specifically opinion pieces – are received and interpreted by their audiences while taking into account the latter’s different backgrounds. This would make it possible to make more concrete inferences about the influence of opinion pieces on the wider public in general, and political behaviour more specifically. Secondly, including online media pieces in the analysis would open up a new dimension that considers wider communicative situations concerning – and in relation to – different publics. Thirdly, the study could certainly benefit from a more narrative perspective that focuses on the ways in which the actors are constructed by the media (for example, in what roles, with which agency, which modalization). Last, but not least, it would be interesting to replicate this study in other contexts not limited solely to the post-Yugoslav one, which could offer a comparative analysis of local discourses surrounding hate speech and contested symbols, along with the signification tendencies that characterize them. A timely example is the *Slava Ukraini!* salute in Ukraine that has spurred controversy both domestically and abroad when employed by pro-Kremlin propagandists to support the perception of “rising Fascistization of Ukrainian politics and society” (see e.g. Rossoliński-Liebe 2014). Memory politics often results in the more prominent (mis)use of controversial symbols in times of crisis or political radicalization, a dynamic usually more powerful in societies (such as post-socialist ones) where lack of open debate has hindered an earlier adequate dealing with the past.

Acknowledgements: This research was supported by the University of Tartu ASTRA Project PER ASPERA, financed by the European Regional Development Fund, and the Estonian Research Council, Grant PRG1716 “Relational approach of strategic history narratives”.

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„Za dom spremni“ u hrvatskim medijima: komemoracije, pobjeda i temelji

U radu se analizira medijski diskurs rabljen uz fenomen fašističkog pozdrava *Za dom spremni* nakon održavanja dviju nacionalnih komemoracija tijekom proljeća 2020. u Hrvatskoj: Jasenovac i Operacija Bljesak. Na proljeće 2020. novoizabrani hrvatski predsjednik Zoran Milanović kritizirao je prisutnost pozdrava na spomenutim komemoracijama zbog povezanosti pozdrava i ustaškog režima koji je bio aktivan tijekom Drugoga svjetskog rata. Milanović je pritom zagovarao uklanjanje i zabranu pozdrava, što je rezultiralo žestokim reakcijama ratnih veterana i političara koji su njegove izjave smatrali neprihvatljivima i uvredljivima prema sjećanju na rat vođen tijekom 1990-ih. Događanja su naposljetku poslužila kao okidač za šire rasprave na temu hrvatskog poslijeratnog nacionalnog identiteta. U fokusu analize jest diskurs oko pozdrava detektiran u medijskim tekstovima objavljenima u travnju, svibnju i lipnju 2020. u tjednim i dnevnim novinama. Budući da je pozdrav sve prisutniji u praksama pregovaranja nacionalnog identiteta i kreiranja političkih agendi, jasniji uvid u mehanizme kojima se opravdava ili osporava u medijima aspekt je koji zaslužuje više pažnje. Oslanjajući se na analizu diskursa, u radu ukazujem na različite artikulacije koje (de)legitimiraju pozdrav, kao i konkretne aktere i djelovanje. Uz pomoć alata semiotike kulture nadalje identificiram šire značenjske prakse i

dominantne diskurse koji služe kao temelj kreacije nacionalnog samo-opisa. Rad doprinosi istraživanju govora mržnje i konfliktnih simbola u post-jugoslavenskom kontekstu te njihove (zlo)upotrebe u društvima koja se bore s traumatičnim nasljeđem.

„Kodumaa eest valmis“ Horvaatia meedias. Mälestamine, võit ja vundament

Artiklis analüüsitakse meediadiskursust, mis ümbritses II maailmasõja fašistlikku tervitust „Kodumaa eest valmis“ (*Za dom spremni*) pärast kahte Horvaatias 2020. aasta kevadel toimunud riiklikku mälestusüritust, milleks olid Jasenovac ja Operatsioon Bljesak. 2020. aasta kevadel kritiseeris Horvaatia vast valitud president Zoran Milanović reservatsioonideta kollaboratsioonistliku Ustaša režiimiga seotud tervituse kasutamist kahel mälestusüritusel, kutsudes üles seda kõrvaldama ning keelustama. See tõi kaasa tormilisi reaktsioone sõjaveteranidelt ning poliitikutelt, kes pidasid Milanovići tegutsemist lubamatuks ning 1990. aastate sõja mälestust ja pärandit solvavaks, mis põhjustas omakorda laiemat debati Horvaatia sõjajärgse rahvusliku identiteedi üle. Analüüsiobjektiks on tervitust ümbritsev diskursus, mida kasutatakse 2020. aasta aprillis, mais ja juunis päeva- ja nädalalehtedes avaldatud arvamusalustes. Kui tervitusest on saanud rahvusliku identiteedi üle toimuvate kõneluste ning poliitiliste tegevuskavade lihvimise üks olulisimaid osi, muutub uurimine, kuidas seda meedias õigustatakse, hukka mõistetakse või sellele muid väljakutseid esitatakse, üha enam tähelepanu väärivaks. Diskursuseuuringute poolt pakutavale toetudes valgustatakse artiklis mitmesuguseid väiteid, mis (de)legitimeerivad seda tervitust ning järelikult ka konkreetseid sellega seostuvaid tegutsejaid ja tegusid. Kultuurisemiootika abiga tuvastatakse avaramaid tähendustendentse ning domineeriv(aid) diskursus(eid), millele on üles ehitatud rahvuslik enesekirjeldus. Artikkel annab panuse vihakõne ning vaidluslaste sümbolite uurimisse Jugoslaavia-järgses ruumis ning nende (kuri)tarvitamisesse traumaatiliste päranditega heitlevates ühiskondades.