

Croatian veteran politics



And the discontents of
therapeutic governance

Photo *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 17.09.2012

‘Vladimir Benac: Kad ispališ jedan metak u strop, da vidiš kako će te poštovati...’ [If you fire a bullet in the ceiling then you’ll see how people respect you]

Inflated Veteran Pensions

- 'I know there were fewer than 2000 defenders in Vukovar, yet today we fork out for over 6000 pensions.'
- 'the further we are from the war, the greater the number of invalid claimants'
- Veterans Minister Predrag Matic Fred
 - *Nacional*, February 2012.
 - <http://www.nacional.hr/clanak/124662/znam-sve-nacine-kako-prevarom-dobiti-invalidnost>

Scale of veteran pensions

- Approximately 70,000 Croatian (HRVI) veteran privileged pensions
 - Plus around 7,000 Croatian Defence Council (HVO), that is, members of the Bosnian Croatian forces with Croatian citizenship.
- Homeland War Veteran pensions doubled between 2003 and 2009
- 1.5 percent of GDP in 2010.
- The 2010 veteran invalid pension costs alone were higher than Croatia's 2010 defence spending

PTSD veteran pensions

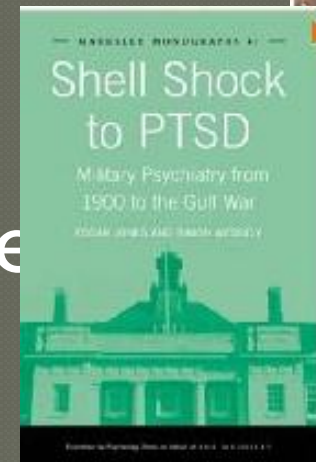
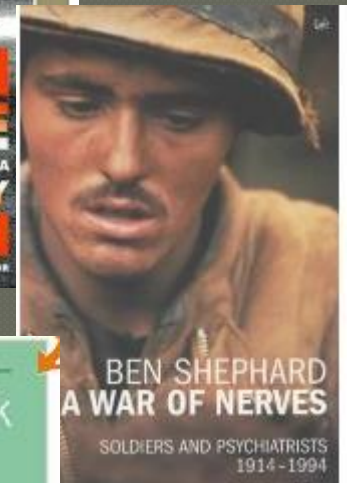
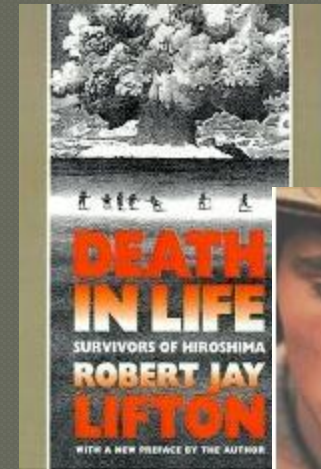
- Many HRVI pensions based on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) claims.
- **Between 50-80% or more relate PTSD**
- PTSD claims have been especially lax, according to World Bank and Veterans Minister Matic.
- Croatia very high PTSD percentage compared to both war death and other war injuries.
 - Compare e.g. UK after WWII = 30,000 psychiatric related veteran pension claimants

Veteran pensions higher

- Average HRVI pension is
 - about a third higher than the average military pension
 - over double that of ordinary pensioners, while their average age is only fifty.
 - **Also much higher than** other civilian disabled claimants although they are generally less disabled than civilian claimants.
 - Plus many other veteran privileges.....
 - e.g. tax exemptions importing cars etc...

PTSD Politics

- PTSD 1980 DSM III
 - Vietnam Veterans Politics
 - Antiwar movement
 - Politics of DSM revisions
 - Holocaust survivor politics
- Fostering medicalisation
- Or therapeutic governance
- of veterans

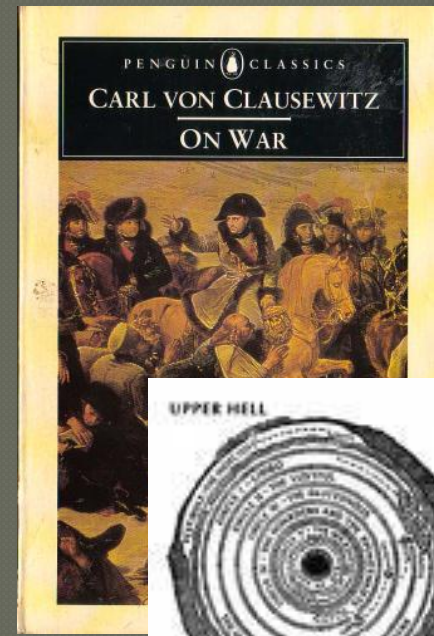


Explosion of trauma programmes in Croatia and Bosnia

- International trauma advocacy as secular form of moral recognition of suffering and victimhood
- 1980s: psychosocial programmes not part of standard aid response
- Became standard in responses to war in Croatia and Bosnia
 - E.g. UNHCR *Guidance on the Care and Protection of Refugee Children* (UNHCR, 1994)
 - UNHCR *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*: 'counselling services should be provided for refugee victims of trauma, especially for refugee women...' (UNHCR, 1991p. 20).
 - 1994 : total of 185 psychosocial programmes in Bosnia and Croatia (Ågger, Vuk & Mimica, 1995)

Global conflict management

- Trauma advocacy also linked to global conflict management
- Conflict as cycles of trauma and violence from social psychology
 - i.e. War trauma not just consequence of war
 - but cause of future war
 - from War as continuation of politics
 - to war as continuation of psychology
- Promoting therapeutic governance
 - Psychosocial conflict management
 - Therapeutic interventions



Recognising PTSD: supporting victims and antiwar politics?

- Origins of PTSD linked to antiwar and human rights advocacy
- Idea of interventions to break cycles of trauma & violence thesis
- But has PTSD approach in Croatia supported victims & progressive antiwar politics? Whether trauma approach or rights approach?
- Case of Croatian veterans politics.....



President Tudjman on PTSD

- Rejection of PTSD paradigm for Croatian veterans
 - Croatian veterans = heroes fighting homeland war
 - Distinct from US soldiers & Vietnam syndrome – dirty war far away lacking meaning. Hence PTSD irrelevant to Croatian veterans
- But Ministry of Defence already accepting the PTSD paradigm...



International expert interventions, training and links

- E. g. Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma
 - Harvard Program adapted its Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ), including a specific version for Croatian veterans, available in English and Croatian.
 - K. Allden, T. Franciškovic, J. Lavelle, M. Mathias, K. McInnes, RF Mollica, L. Moro, *Harvard Trauma Manual: Croatian Veterans Version* (Cambridge: Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, 1998).
 - Essentially Croatian diagnostic check-lists based on DSM-IV (see next slide) with some adaptation linked to subject's combat experiences and impact of trauma on ability to function in every day life.
 - Adoption of PTSD model by local psychiatrists emphasising the need for social support to prevent chronic problems in those who fought for their country
 - E.g. Zoran Komar and Herman Vukušić, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Croatian War Veterans; Incidence and Psychosocial Features* (Zagreb: Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia, 2000) http://www.iamps.org/IAMPS_Split_2000_Komar.pdf

American Psychiatric Association

DSM-IV (2000)

- From US National Association for PTSD

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/dsm-iv-tr-ptsd.asp>

- ‘Diagnostic criteria for PTSD include a history of exposure to a traumatic event meeting two criteria and symptoms from each of three symptom clusters: intrusive recollections, avoidant/numbing symptoms, and hyper-arousal symptoms. A fifth criterion concerns duration of symptoms and a sixth assesses functioning.’ See notes attached below

- Criterion A: stressor
- Criterion B: intrusive recollection;
- Criterion C: avoidant/numbing
- Criterion D: hyper-arousal
- Criterion E: duration
- Criterion F: functional significance

Plus questions related to combat experiences and impact of trauma on ability to function in everyday life in particular country

While Croatian psychiatrists adopted PTSD model...

- Certain ambivalence between PTSD model and Croatian national and veteran narratives
 - Anthropologist Allan Young describes: 'the clinical ideology identified the patients' disorder with a loss of ontological security that was traced to the veterans' inability to reconcile their traumatic memories of Vietnam (often involving atrocities) with their cognitive schemas, the moral codes, self-concepts, beliefs about human nature, and notions of cosmic justice through which these men attempted to impose a sense of order and meaning on the world.' Young, *Harmony of Illusion*, 1995, p. 8
 - Croatian national and veteran narratives of war distinct from US narratives of Vietnam....

Croatian national narratives v trauma expertise assumptions

- Central traumatic event – Serbian aggression – simultaneously the founding Croatian national event
 - Pre-traumatic self = Yugoslav citizen
 - Post-traumatic self = Croatian citizen
 - Traumatic war experiences confirming nationalist narratives of just Homeland War against Serbian aggression
 - I.e. Veterans may reconcile their traumatic war experiences with nationalist ideology of Serbian aggression
 - I.e. They may develop a sense of ontological security in their Croatian national identity and identity as Croatian veteran hero.
 - Not simply veterans replaying and reliving the war, but nationalist narratives
 - i.e. Tudman instinctively understanding PTSD diagnosis implicitly pathologising the founding Croatian national event



'Therapeutic demilitarization' I

- However Croatian war not simply won on battlefield but through international intervention
- Hence Croatian national narratives 'Janus-faced' (James Gow) i.e. seeking both international legitimacy as victims and national legitimacy as heroes
- Trauma framework becoming interlinked with NATO and EU requirements for demilitarization
- Importance of political-military nexus to government legitimacy (Bellamy, Gow)
- Problem of demobilisation meaning unemployment
- PTSD legitimising inflation of veteran pension claims, institutionalising veteran rights & facilitating veteran politics




**ZAJEDNICA UDRUGA
HRVATSKI RATNI VETERANI**
CROATIAN WAR VETERANS ASSOCIATION



'Therapeutic demilitarization' II

- Instead of reduction of Croatian army breaking nationalist 'political-military nexus' (Bellamy)....



- Trauma pension claims continuing 'political-military nexus' in another form
- i.e. nationalist elite's political patronage and legitimacy - able to cultivate privileged veteran sector and give invalidity pensions based on international PTSD models.

Croatian Nationalist and Veterans Politics



'We will protest until all our veterans awaiting trials for alleged war crimes are released. We will not desist until that happens.'

'Free Croatian generals...'

Importance of veterans to defend Croatian national narratives of the Homeland war and to mobilise against political opponents

Military/Veteran threats faced by Coalition government in early 2000s

- Military/veteran threats over arrests of Croatian veterans for war crimes in relation to ICTY (Hague Tribunal) indictments
 - Proclamation of 12 Croatian Generals Sept 2000 + veteran demonstrations against war crimes trials and undermining reputation of the Homeland War, calls for civil disobedience to prevent arrests being carried out..
- In response, Croatian Parliament adopted Declaration on the Homeland War October 2000
 - ‘preventing radical politicisation of the Homeland War and the polarisation of Croatian Society’
 - Article 5 of Declaration: essentially recognises extensive veteran welfare demands in circumstances where international pressure prevents Croatia from recognising veterans political demands for immunity from prosecution....

'Therapeutic demilitarization' III

- In essence, Coalition government of early 2000s fudged military reform
 - Yes it reduced the Croatian military, but only by displacing political-military nexus in its affirmation of veteran welfare privileges
 - NB in Croatia veterans commonly referred to not as 'veterani' but branitelji' i.e. defenders or fighters
 - However these concessions were not enough...
 - Return of nationalist HDZ to government....
 - Mid-2000s witnessing massive rise of veteran pension claims, many based on trauma claims....





Former Croatian PM Jadranka Kosor

- Politician particularly associated with expansion of veteran trauma claims
 - Former broadcaster - Croatian Radio Programme on victims of Homeland war
 - Member of former ruling HDZ party and becoming Member of Croatian Parliament in 1995
 - Minister of Veterans, Family and Intergenerational Solidarity, 2004- Summer 2009
 - Victim/veteran politics: 'Let us not squabble over the veterans' back, we have a commitment to them and they are above politics', Kosor on the 2007 Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day



Combating pension claims?...

- 2012 return of coalition government against background of economic crisis and rising unemployment
- More public criticisms of inflated veteran pension claims
 - E.g. 'There are currently 250 doctors in Croatia qualifying in PTSD, but no success in curing PTSD'
 - 'I know there were fewer than 2000 defenders in Vukovar, yet today we fork out for over 6000 pensions.'
 - 'the further we are from the war, the greater the number of invalid claimants'
 - Veterans Minister, Predrag Matic' Fred, *Nacional*, 7 February 2012.

Social resentment of Veteran Privileges

Croatian internet comments:

- Ironic comments to Youtube clip: Franjo Tujman - Imamo svoju Hrvatsku [We have our Croatia]
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6hTbLJszyM>
 - 'Veterans have shamelessly parasited off this poor society.'
 - 'In Serbia and Bosnia, there's no PTSD because there's no money. But Herman Vukušić created a caste of military professionals here who live well off PTSD and for PTSD.'
-
- But reluctance of government or professionals to take specific responsibility for confronting veteran vested interests and cutting veteran privileges... e.g. psychiatrists have suggested veterans should sort out who are false claimants

State of Croatian economy



- Rising national debt....
- While Germany/EU has not yet demanded Croatia make dramatic budgetary cuts, the IMF has already been pressing nextdoor Bosnia over its relatively more circumscribed veteran privileges. And since the EU is primarily offering austerity to its members as the central solution to economic crisis, then Croatia is likely to face EU austerity measures as southern Europe.

Croatia on the couch

- The sociological literature on veterans call for the need to integrate veterans into society, but integration for Croatia's veterans simply means integration into insecurity.The veteran privileges cultivated by the Croatian political elite under successive governments have bought political quietism for nearly two decades, but at the expense of jeopardising society's future, including that of the redundant privileged veterans.
- The coalition government has so far lacked the will to fundamentally address veteran privileges. Its central policy of a veterans' war record register does not challenge veteran privileges per se, only the most blatant abuses. Instead the authorities are essentially handing over responsibility for Croatia's future to the EU and other international institutions.



Croatian veteran politics: A Cautionary Tale

- Croatian veteran politics raises questions over international trauma models and international therapeutic governance
 - Not just over whether they promote postwar recovery or not
 - Croatia's problem of veteran 'pensionitus' or 'pension neurosis'
 - But also whether they support demilitarization and democratic politics
 - in Croatia, international trauma models have helped legitimise continuation of the wartime political-military nexus and its mobilisation to intimidate political opposition