

VUKOVAR: MEMORY, MEDIA AND MYTH

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Vukovar is small city located on the banks of the Danube in the northeastern portion of Croatia, approximately an hour's drive west of the border with Serbia. In 1991, following the declaration of independence of by the Republic of Croatia, some of the first war crimes perpetrated by Serb military forces occurred during a three-month siege of the city. It is important to understand the events in Vukovar because the siege has become a cornerstone in the story of Croatian independence. The battle of Vukovar represents some of the larger barriers to reconciliation facing Croatia and Serbia as collective memory perpetuates the "victim/perpetrator" mentality among Croats and Serbs, with both sides inserting themselves into the role of "victim" and the other into the role of "perpetrator." Yugoslavia's system of state-controlled media produced incorrect and, in some cases, blatantly false information during the battle for Vukovar while at the same the time politicians on both sides utilized the media to instill fear and hatred in citizens. The daily events during the siege of Vukovar, covered almost exclusively by Croat and Serb journalists, resulted in two competing accounts of events that were influential in creating myths now embedded in collective memory. I will argue that the Serbian media played a pivotal role in falsely reporting information that propagated ethnic hatred and hostilities toward the Croat population and in many ways influenced the creation of myths that continue to hamper reconciliation to this day.

Myths that led to War

A common facet of communist countries is state-controlled media, and in Yugoslavia this was no different. Following the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, Slobodan Milošević ascended to power, and immediately undertook specific measures to insure media support of his regime. Beginning as early as 1987, Slobodan Milošević used Serb media such as *Radio and Television Serbia*, and newspapers such as *Blic*, *Politika* and *Večernje novosti* to strengthen support for a greater Serbia. He purged the Yugoslav media of journalists that did not report news containing his biases and harnessed the media to support his agenda for a greater Serbia.¹ Journalists who attempted to produce independent stories were

1. Renaud de la Brosse, "Political Propaganda and the Plan to Create a 'State for all Serbs:' Consequences of using the Media for Ultra-Nationalist Ends," Special Report for International Criminal Tribunal Slobodan Milošević Indictment Case no. IT-02-54-T.

marginalized and in some cases fired from state sponsored media agencies.² Some journalists found work in smaller regional television and newspaper agencies in Croatia. It is important to understand that Serbian media was accessible throughout Yugoslavia as the national media, while regions such as Croatia had regional news coverage of important news and information within Croatia. Unlike Serbia, Croatian news agencies did not present an inflated nationalized version of news until well after they declared independence in 1991.

As tensions mounted in the various regions of Yugoslavia, Croatia began talks of succession. Increasingly Serbian media instigated public outrage against Croats with stories containing accusations of Croats being fascists Ustaše, a historical term referring to the Nazi collaborators that persecuted Serbians during the Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia during World War II. The Serb media used several events undertaken by Franjo Tuđman shortly after becoming president of Croatia in 1990 to insight public fear. Specifically, Tuđman re-introduced the *šahovnica*, the red-and-white checkerboard coat-of-arms. The Serb media overlooked the historical background of the *šahovnica*, which originated during the tenth century, and instead compared it to the coat of arms displayed by Croatian fascists during World War II.³ Although similar, the first square in upper-left corner of the fascist era coat-of-arms was white whereas the first square in the modern coat-of-arms is red, an intentional change in order to differentiate the new symbol from a difficult past.⁴ The Serb media also published stories reminding the public of the violence perpetrated by fascist Croats and Nazis against Serbs during World War II, most notably the massacre of Serbs at the Jasenovac concentration camp. The purpose of these stories seemed to be to revive past animosities by noting similarities between the current symbols of Tuđman's government and those of a painful and violent period for Serbs; the implication being, it could happen again.

As tensions mounted in the spring of 1991, Milošević declared the necessity and intent to protect Serb "majorities" within Croatia. Interestingly, the population of Vukovar was 84,189 with approximately 43.8 percent Croats and 37.4 percent Serbs, yet Vukovar became one of the first locations Milošević sought to "protect," even though there was no Serb majority.⁵ There has been some debate as to why Milošević chose Vukovar as a city of importance. Militarily and strategically there was no significance to the city. The town did not have any major industries or supply lines and held little to no significant historical value to Serbs. So the question remains unanswered, however, it is important to note that a town with no geopolitical or historical significance prior to the Homeland Wars emerged

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2. *Frontline*, "The World's Most Wanted Man: How Yugoslavia's Destroyers Harnessed the Media," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/karadzic/bosnia/media.html> (accessed October 5, 2010).
 3. Sabrina P. Ramet, *Thinking About Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. ICTY 1997 amended indictment against Mile Mrkšić, Miroslav Radić, Veselin Šljivančanin, and Slavko Dokmanović for the mass killing at Ovčara of approximately 200 Croatian and other non-Serb persons who had been removed from the Vukovar Hospital on November 20, 1991, Case no. IT-95-13a-I, <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/dokmanovic/ind/en/mrk-2ai1971202e.pdf> (accessed April 28, 2009).

from the battle cloaked in national symbolism for Croatians.

The Battle of Vukovar

In June 1991 Croatia declared independence and Milošević immediately sent in the Yugoslav national army (JNA) troops to secure the city of Vukovar. A three-month siege ensued, which resulted in the almost complete destruction of the town by a daily barrage of bombs from August until November 1991. The JNA and Chetnik⁶ forces greatly outnumbered the approximate 1800 Croat militia. Approximately 1,624 people were killed and 2,557 were wounded during the three months of fighting.⁷ Other accounts put the number of missing and killed closer to 4,000 with approximately 22,000 citizens forced to flee the city.⁸

The Vukovar hospital, which housed many of the Croatian wounded, became the last refuge for many of the town's remaining inhabitants who hoped to be evacuated along with the patients in the presence of neutral international observers. When it became apparent the city was going to fall, staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) negotiated with the JNA leaders for the evacuation of patients and staff from Vukovar hospital to take place on November 19th.⁹ However, on the morning of the 19th JNA forces denied the Red Cross entry to city to evacuate the hospital. Not until six years later did the public learn the truth about the fate of the hospital's occupants. Instead of evacuating the hospital's occupants to concentration camps as the army later claimed, the JNA actually bused the approximate three hundred patients and staff out of the city to a compound on the outskirts of town in nearby Ovčara. Serb paramilitary forces beat the victims for several hours prior to executing them and dumping their bodies into a mass grave.¹⁰ The lack of accurate information regarding the fate of the hospital staff, patients, and other civilians in the town perpetuated a legacy of rumors and myth whose roots lie in the fictitious Serbian media and military accounts of the battle of Vukovar.

Media

The dichotomy between Croatian and Serbian media accounts is telling. *Vreme* described the siege as "Serbia's Gallipoli" while the Croatian press described it in terms of a battle between "David

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6. During World War I, Chetniks were elite troops of the Royal Army of the Kingdom of Serbia. During World War II, Chetniks led by Draža Mihailović were devoted to the King and were particularly known for their brutality in war. Mihailović's Chetniks and Josip Broz Tito's Partisans were the main anti-Axis troops that fought against Croat Ustaše (pro-German) and Nazis the occupied Yugoslavia beginning in April 1941. During the Yugoslav wars from 1991 to 1995 several Serbian paramilitary units adopted the historical name "Chetnik." During this time Chetnik was also as a derogatory term for any Serb.
 7. Goran Jungvirth, "Vukovar Still Divided 15 Years On," *B92*, November 27, 2006, http://www.b92.net/eng/insight/opinions.php?nav_id=38241&version (accessed April 26, 2009).
 8. Helen Seeney, "Croatia: Vukovar is Still Haunted by the Shadow of its Past," *Deutsche Welle-World.De*, 22.08.2006, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,2129420.html> (accessed April 26, 2009).
 9. ICTY Case no. IT-95-13a-I.
 10. ICTY Case no. IT-95-13a-I.

and Goliath” and as Croatia’s “Stalingrad.”¹¹ In an August 30, 1991 article the Croatian newspaper *Vjesnik* proclaimed, “Croatia at War for Defense of Freedom” and in the bi-line states “Generals’ Fury Destroys Towns.”¹² The accompanying picture shows the ruins of buildings in Vukovar. Conversely, the Serbian media frequently portrayed more sensationalized events in broadcasts that resulted in a more emotionally charged response from both Serbs and Croats. For example, JNA and Chetnik soldiers were shown chanting “Slobo, bring the salad, there will be meat, we’re slaughtering the Croats.”¹³ This story and other similar stories of Serb atrocities against Croats caused mass panic and outrage within Croatia.

Serbian news also included stories containing military personnel and civilians using ethnic slurs that depicted Croats, regardless of whether they were civilian or military, as murders that deserved to die. The international press also published similar news stories. For example, during an October 29th interview with BBC journalist Carole Walker, a JNA leader tried to explain the importance of Vukovar stating, “It’s not Croatian territory, it’s the territory of Yugoslavia. The fact is that those Croatian forces, they are the ones who have killed, strangled, and massacred the people who were living here.”¹⁴ The slant of the Serb account of the events in Vukovar was apparent to journalist Alan Ferguson of the *Toronto Star* who interviewed Lt. Colonel Miodrad Panic just days after the fall of Vukovar. Ferguson noted, “In their crude attempt yesterday to brand Croats as the sole evil-doers in Vukovar, army commanders used a language that appealed *more to the emotions than the intellect*.”¹⁵ Ethnic slurs, images of dead bodies strewn along roadsides, and images of elderly Croat civilians fleeing the city on foot followed by Chetniks mocking them heightened emotions on both sides and appeared repeatedly in the Serb media broadcasts. These images became embedded in collective memory and continue to produce emotional and nationalist responses nineteen years after the fact.

The fictitious stories published by the Serbian media were perhaps the most damaging and a vital element that embedded myth into collective memory. One story in particular surfaced in the Serbian press as factual, even though reporters had not verified the source. The story, really nothing more than a rumor, emerged regarding the discovery of forty Serbian school children in a kindergarten with their throats slit by Croatian forces in a suburb of Vukovar.¹⁶ The report allegedly came from a *Reuters*’ journalist who witnessed the incident, however *Reuters* never published the story and none of

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11. Milos Vasic, “The Vukovar Front: The Galipoli of Serbia,” *Vreme News Digest Agency* No. 7, November 11, 1991, http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian_digest/7/t7-2.htm (accessed September 3, 2010).
 12. Dubravka Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 47.
 13. Eric Stover and Gilles Peres, *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* (New York: Scalo, 1998), 266.
 14. BBC, “Vukovar Massacre: What Happened,” BBC News Web site, Real Player video file, 2:37, http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/video/39160000/rm/_39160412_vukovar1991_walker_vi.ram (accessed August 8, 2010).
 15. Alan Ferguson, “Fallen Vukovar Reveals War Horrors,” *Toronto Star*, November 22, 1991. Emphasis mine.
 16. “Politika falsifikata,” *Dosije Vremena*, January 23, 1999, http://www.vreme.com/arhiva_html/431/8.html#IVC (accessed August 8, 2010); Žarka Radoja, “Krvavi Medijski Pir Nad Izmisljenim Zločinima,” *e-Novine*, November 18, 2009, <http://www.e-novine.com/feljton/32294-Krvavi-medijski-pir-nad-izmiljenim-zloinima.html> (accessed July 14, 2010).

the *Reuters* correspondents verified the incident. Other news agencies, such as *NPR*, attempted to verify the story and were unable to. In a broadcast on November 20, 1991 journalist Tom Gjelten reported the evacuation “400 sick and wounded Croatsians” from the Vukovar hospital by the JNA. He described the chaos in Vukovar following the fall of the city noting, “Each side is accusing the other of a massacre.” Gjelten admitted surprise at hearing the rumor about the massacred children in Borovo Naselje stating he had recently been in the suburb and “most of the Serbs, certainly the children, had gotten out of the town several months ago.”¹⁷ The story was later determined to be completely fictitious, yet there was no retraction issued by the Serbian press. The public responded to the story immediately with outrage and the story continues to circulate as fact in public discourse. It is ironic to note that this story coincided with rumors emerging out of Vukovar regarding the massacre of the hospital staff and patients.

Similar fictitious stories published in Serbia’s *Politika* on November 18, 1991 described Croatian National Guardsmen walking around “with necklaces containing the gold teeth of elderly victims and fingers cut from murdered Serb children.”¹⁸ These stories incensed the Serbian citizenry who demanded retribution. This, in turn, justified any military action carried out against Croatia’s civilian population. Because these events, distorted and fictionalized by the Serb media garnered such immense political support for the war, they created a precedent followed later by the Croatian media during the wars in Bosnia. Media accounts justified atrocious crimes committed by both sides during the war, which in a different political atmosphere, would have resulted in immediate public outcry. The use of atrocities directed against children and the elderly emerged repeatedly in the Serb press. Stories of atrocities committed against the young and elderly civilians who are perceived as particularly vulnerable routinely emerge in the midst of wartime environments. These types of stories have been used repeatedly throughout history and date back to the Middle Ages and Christian accounts of Jewish atrocities directed against Christian children. Similar stories emerged during World War I of innocent Belgium children having hands severed by vicious German soldiers and again during World War II with examples such as Anne Frank.¹⁹ While not all of the stories were true, they were presented to the public as factual and frequently intertwined with truthful events, which in turn transformed them into believable accounts. The purpose of these types of stories was simple; they were intended to generate an emotional response from the public, which would guarantee continued support of the war. This is one example of how myth evolved from rumor to fact and has become embedded in public discourse and memory surrounding the siege of Vukovar.

Sensationalized and fictitious media stories were common place in Serbia, even though some were so incredible it is difficult to understand how such stories were accepted as accurate and truthful. For example, *Politika* in an article in October 1991 described the capture of fourteen Czech women fighting for the Croatsians. The story described the women as being “Catholic parachutists in NATO camouflage

17. *All Things Considered*, NPR, November 20, 1991.

18. Radoja, “Krvavi Medijski Pir Nad Izmisljenim Zločinima.”

19. John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 369.

uniforms that had been dropped in the area of Osijek [near Vukovar] from Hungarian planes.”²⁰ These types of fictitious stories frequently overshadowed truthful accounts describing atrocities committed in Vukovar directed against Croat civilians, making the truth about what happened difficult for anyone to ascertain.

Memory

The emotions that evolved from media reports had a lasting effect on the collective memory of both Serbs and Croats. Serbs believed the information broadcast through their media that, in many ways, created a biased and often blatantly fictionalized account of events in Vukovar. The media portrayed political and military personnel, such as Milošević and JNA captain Miroslav Radić, as protectors and heroes who had delivered Serbs from the violence of fascist Croats. The impact of the media stories became evident in the years following the war, when mass graves containing the bodies of Croat civilians were discovered and war crimes indictments issued against Serb military leaders and President Milošević. Large protests followed the arrest of Milošević because Serbs believed their heroes had been victimized by false evidence and were being framed. The Serbian media's portrayal of the participants in the battle of Vukovar and the reasons used to justify the senseless destruction of the city served as a basis for the cultural discourse surrounding the war and in many ways shaped Serbian perception of events in Vukovar.

Heroes emerged during the battle for Vukovar in Croatian news as well. Siniša Glavašević, the lone journalist from Radio Croatia Vukovar who provided hourly updates of the fighting from his home inside the city was celebrated as a national hero for attempting to broadcast the truth about what was happening in Vukovar. Croat military personnel such as Commander Blago Zadro, killed during fighting in Vukovar on October 16, 1991, and Colonel Marko Babić have been exalted as national heroes. There are YouTube videos, Facebook pages, and websites devoted to Vukovar and the heroes from both sides. Social media formats combine with the fact that people can respond anonymously, thereby giving them the freedom to speak without fear of recourse. This brings up an interesting question about how memory and fact are shaped and re-shaped through social media formats. While historians may discount Facebook and other forms of social media as not being valid formats for historical information, these formats nonetheless force historians to consider how memory is constantly being reshaped and the fact that social media allows a continuous and ever evolving discourse of historical events. Especially in an age when the then children or even those who were not born at the time of the battle of Vukovar are now commenting on events of the past and their basis of knowledge is often second generational memory and myth. It is therefore important to note the significance of social media and the internet in re-shaping memory.

Social media formats are also interesting to examine in the ways in which myth and

20. Stojan Cerovic, “In the Trap of Patriotism,” *Vreme News Digest Agency No. 10*, December 2, 1991, http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/serbian_digest/10/t10-9.htm (accessed September 3, 2010).

misinformation have become engrained in the discourse of a much younger generation. Younger generations are much more computer savvy and capable of posting videos to YouTube and other formats, bringing events to a broader audience while at the same time engendering them with their own biases and interpretation of events. For example, a YouTube video of the evacuation of the non-Serb civilians from a suburb of Vukovar prior to the fall of the city entitle “Exodus: Vukovar 1991.” The title alone suggests a religious connotation to the suffering of the civilians shown in the video. The video is set to Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, which makes the video much more moving, and by design generates a more emotional response, as opposed to reading about the evacuation in a newspaper. The video was originally posted to YouTube in December 2006 and since that date has been viewed 208, 672 times and posted to Facebook 1,349 times. The most recent comment requesting information about the events depicted in the video was posted January 4, 2010.²¹ As long as videos remain in the YouTube library they are available for viewing and continue to impact memory and spawn dialog on the events in Vukovar. Therefore, the power of social media can not be underestimated, especially as it relates to the construction or memory and truth.

The competition between mythical discourse and fact continues to this day and is especially visible in the news articles in the weeks leading up to November 18, Croatia’s national Day of Remembrance of the fall of Vukovar and the massacre that followed. There are songs, movies, and television dramas devoted to Vukovar that, in some cases, attempt to initiate a dialog in order to facilitate reconciliation and dispel rumors. However, there are far more websites and blogs that perpetuate a competing discourse between Croats and Serbs and distort facts while others are simply hate filled rants.

Interesting as well are the number of memorials dedicated to the heroes and victims of Vukovar, but what is more telling is the lack of memorials dedicated to Serbian victims. A fact that is often overlooked is that innocent civilians, both Serb and Croat, suffered as a result of the siege of Vukovar. Since Vukovar was turned over to Croatia in 1996, the city has been clothed in a mythic quality of sacredness that purposely ignores the former Serbs who lived and died there and denies Serbs who returned active participation in the discourse on the memory of the siege. Catholic representations and memorials carrying the Croatian *šahovnica* are common. Memorial candles burn night and day while flowers, ribbons, and Croatian flags are a constant presence. Noticeably absent are Orthodox representations and memorials to the Serbian victims of the battle. The town cemetery containing the remains of all of the town’s inhabitants, regardless of ethnic heritage, frequently suffers vandalism and desecration of the Serbian Orthodox headstones.

The events of Vukovar and the larger issues that brought about the dissolution of Yugoslavia continue to be misunderstood on an international level, in many ways due to misinformation passed on by American media, but also due to a lack of historical knowledge about the country. So confusing were the wars in the various territories that several international television networks decided against

21. “Exodus: Vukovar 1991,” *YouTube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyxXDnSgJXw> (accessed January 7, 2010).

explaining the various regional differences because they reasoned it “would be beyond viewers’ comprehension.”²² The U.S. media formats news stories in short fifteen to twenty second segments because the attention span of the public has been deemed to short to hold interest in longer news. The news is also mediated for the public by those who produce it. News organizations and their owners determine what is news worthy and in 1991 when war broke out in Yugoslavia, the attention of the United States was on the Persian Gulf War. Therefore, there remains little understanding of the events in Vukovar and of the Homeland Wars within the United States. More attention has been devoted to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague following the dissolution of Yugoslavia than was ever devoted to the actual events that caused it.

The distortion of events in Vukovar by the Serb media is also important to understand due to the fact that U.S journalists frequently used Serb journalists as sources for factual information as well as translators, and unwittingly passed on Serb biases. The lack of historical understanding about the region exacerbated this problem. Prior assumptions about Slavs in general, “and Yugoslavia and its history in particular, determined reporting, influenced editorial positions, and otherwise distorted reporters’ grasp of reality and acted as filters on their mediation of events and personalities.”²³ This lack of understanding continues today. The difficulty in trying to determine the truth of events is extremely complicated in the climate of competing historiographies that emerged in the wake of the war. Much of the historiography has itself incorporated myths and misinformation that emerged from the Serbian account of events, both by military and media which makes it frustrating to try to determine the facts of events. Transcripts of the war crimes trials at The Hague remain one of the better sources of information, yet one that the average citizen is not going to seek out. Instead, media accounts of the trial remain a popular source of information.

Myth

The fact that the siege of Vukovar was covered predominantly by Croatian and Serbian media robbed the world of the unbiased voice of disinterested outsiders. Myth shaped historical perceptions during the years in which factual information was not widely available. For example, Serbs initially claimed that the bodies located in mass graves in and around Vukovar were Croat soldiers who had been killed in the course of war. This was later determined to be false, but in the interim factual knowledge about the fate of victims remained elusive, and loved ones readily developed their own imagined stories about the fate of their loved ones. Survivors cleave to memories of those whom they lost during the war and erect memorials for the missing.

Families of the missing repeatedly eulogize missing loved ones, but for some, the difficulty of remembering and the refusal to acknowledge the deaths of sons and husbands adds to the complexity of Vukovar. Many of the women used denial and dissociation as coping strategies, clinging to the hope

22. Cerovic, “In the Trap of Patriotism.”

23. James J. Sadkovich, *The U.S. Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), xiii.

that their missing loved one would someday return.²⁴ In some cases, loved ones created idealized myths about how their sons died in battle or escaped. The trauma associated with identifying remains, some of which are only fragments of bones, in some cases perpetuates these myths and conflicted memories because the mothers refuse to accept that their sons are dead. “Victims of trauma frequently lack the ability to consciously integrate their experiences. As long as there is interruption in the flow of memories, the trauma cannot be shaped into a personal narrative.”²⁵

Legacy

November 18, 2010 marks the nineteenth anniversary of the massacre and attempts to foster reconciliation continue between newly elected Croatian president Ivo Josipović and Serbian president Boris Tadić. News coverage of Tadić’s recently announced plans to visit Vukovar in order to pay his respects to the victims was met with a mixed response. Some Croatians responded angrily and right-wing politicians recounted Vukovar as “sacred soil” that Tadić had no right to step foot on.²⁶ Some Serbians responded with an equal air of frustration that Croatians unjustly claimed sole ownership of the title of “victim” in Vukovar. However, there were Croats and Serbs who responded acknowledging it is time to move forward instead of constantly rehashing the pain and suffering that both sides inflicted on each other during the Homeland Wars.

What was perhaps more interesting was the response from both sides once Tadić actually set foot on Croatian soil on November 4, 2010. Very few of the right-wing protestors who had spoken out against Tadić’s visit in the Croatian media actually made the trek to Vukovar to participate in any form of physical protest. Instead, a handful of protestors formed in front of the water tower in Vukovar with signs that read “our blood is on your hands” and “our blood can’t be washed away.”²⁷ Tadić and Croatian president Ivo Josipović visited Vukovar together with approximately fifty onlookers in black morning attire. Tadić laid a wreath at the Ovčara Monument and gave a brief speech. His message was one of moving forward towards reconciliation, with the visit to Vukovar being the first step. Tadić said, “I am here to once again offer words of apology, to express regret and create a possibility for Serbs and Croats, Serbia and Croatia, to turn a new page of history.”²⁸ He further stated, “Everything that happened to Serbs and Croats in the twentieth century can be put in the book of the past, which in itself would be an

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24. Slavica Jurcevic, Ivan Urlic, and Mirela Vlasterlica, “Denial and Dissociation as Coping Strategies in Mothers’ Postmortem Identification of Their Sons,” *American Imago* 62, no.4 (Winter 2005), http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.lib.csus.edu/journals/american_imago/v062/62.4jurcevic.pdf (accessed February 2, 2009).
 25. Jurcevic, Urlic, and Vlasterlica, “Denial and Dissociation.”
 26. “Tadić Not Welcome in Vukovar,” *B92*, September 18, 2010, http://www.b92.net/eng/newscomments.php?nav_id=69743#hrono (accessed September 18, 2010).
 27. “Vukovar je Ovčara,” *Jutarnji.hr*, November 4, 2010, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/foto-prosvjednici-u-vukovaru-porucili-borisu-tadicu--nasa-krv-na-vasim-je-rukama/900688/> (accessed November 4, 2010).
 28. “Serb Leader Tadic Apologises for 1991 Vukovar Massacre,” *BBC*, November 4, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11689153> (accessed November 5, 2010).

act of writing a book of the future.”²⁹

Once again, the message of events was presented through the media, this time however through a more unbiased approach. Unlike the 1990s, modern on-line newspapers have the ability to allow responses from readers through blog format. The responses to Tadić’s visit were again mixed, however what was more telling was how quickly constructive comments and opinions descended into name calling and ridiculous banter filled with much of the falsities and ethnic slurs that were rampant in the Serb media releases during the Homeland Wars. This is perhaps the best evidence of the long lasting effect of Serb media misinformation that continues to appear in modern discourse. While some may discount news blogs and social media as not sound historical sources, they do beg the question of how modern communities communicate and disseminate ideas. How important are these forms of media communication in passing on misinformation and biases? Or more importantly, do they re-shape memory in a positive or negative way? In 2009 Serbia’s war crimes prosecutors finally initiated an investigation into the role of the Serbian journalists in “stoking war crimes” during 1991-1995 by using inflamed language, distorting events, and creating fictitious stories.³⁰ As yet no indictments have been issued against journalists, but at least attempts are being made to reveal the truth about the media’s role in inciting animosities.

The battle for Vukovar has become a national symbol of Croatia’s struggle for freedom. Reconstruction is a slow process in Vukovar, battle scars remain everywhere and serve as a reminder to the wounds that have not healed. The 2001 census reveals that fewer Serbs than Croats have returned to Vukovar following the war. The population of Vukovar in 2001 was 31,670 with Croats 57.46 percent and Serbs 32.88 percent.³¹ Thousands of tourists visit the memorials in Vukovar and Ovčara every year. They continually memorialize the heroics of those who died there. Every November 18 is a national Day of Remembrance in Croatia. These events help victims recover from their loss but in some ways they also serve as a painful reminder. The legacy of Vukovar serves as an example of how words and images published by a biased media instigated ethnic animosities that helped dissolve a country.

29. “Tadić apologizes during Vukovar Visit,” *B92*, November 4, 2010, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2010&mm=11&dd=04&nav_id=70684 (accessed November 5, 2010).

30. Aleksandar Vasovic, “Serbia Investigates Media Role in War Crimes,” *Reuters*, June 8, 2009, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L865643.htm> (accessed October 4, 2010).

31. Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census, http://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm (accessed February 15, 2009).



Memorial at Ovčara where 200 bodies of the patients, staff, and civilians removed from Vukovar hospital were located in a mass gravesite in 1996. The bodies of the remaining 61 persons taken from the hospital have never been located. Photo by Annie Snider.