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Tuning into Turmoil: Exploring the Nexus of Popular Culture and the Reproduction of Residual Conflictual Dynamics

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Tuning into Turmoil: Exploring the Nexus of Popular Culture and the Reproduction of Residual Conflictual Dynamics

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Abstract:

This thesis examines how popular culture, particularly music, contributes to the reproduction of conflictual dynamics in post-conflict societies. Drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives, the study explores the role of music as both a reflection and catalyst of societal attitudes and divisions. Through process tracing, the research focuses on the Croatian 90s Homeland War emerged-artist Marko Perković "Thompson" as a case study to uncover the mechanisms by which popular culture perpetuates conflictual dynamics. By embodying a myth, Thompson reinforces a collective memory of Croatian descent and Homeland War memory by creating an echo chamber rooted in a "common sense" ideology of nationalist sentiments and historical grievances. Subsequently by becoming a living monument, he acts as a mnemonic beacon of a collective consciousness for his audience which reflects his views, actions, and opinions in their behavior and habits due to the reciprocal nature between artist and audience.

Keywords: popular culture; music; Marko Perković Thompson; conflictual dynamics; post-conflict

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List of Abbreviations:

DP – Domovinski Pokret (“Homeland Movement”)

HDZ – Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (“Croatian Democratic Union”)

HOS – Hrvatske obrambene snage (“Croatian defense forces”)

JNA – Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija (“Yugoslav People’s Army”)

NDH – Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (“Independent State of Croatia”)

OSRH – Oružane snage Republike Hrvatske (“Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia”)

SDP – Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske (“Social Democratic Party of Croatia”)

SDSS – Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka (“Independent Democratic Serb Party”)

SVK – Srpska vojska Krajine (“Serbian Army of Krajina”)

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1) Introduction

In an age where media consumption is everpresent, does the concept of "mere entertainment" exist? As an example, can Taylor Swift simply be an entertainer or does she act as a mouthpiece of capitalism urging her audience to be consumers? Can entertainment truly be free of ideology, especially when it is produced and consumed on a mass scale? These questions become particularly pertinent in post-conflict societies, where popular culture can play a significant role in shaping collective memory and identity as a notable agent of influence and expression. When we examine popular culture (media with accessibility and appeal “consumed by the majority of a society's population”) that reaches wide audiences, it becomes apparent that these cultural products often carry implicit messages that reflect and influence societal values and political dynamics (Ashley Crossman, 2019).

Because the working definition of popular culture is broad, it would be unfeasible to look at the entirety of popular culture in a research project. Therefore, this thesis will shed light on music and all of its intricacies as the main scope of research; inspired by the somewhat “symbiotic” relationship between music and politics, and the studies conducted on their connection ranging from analyses of classical music's role in nationalism to investigations into the emergence of musical nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe (Brincker, 2014; Lajosi, 2014; Leerssen, 2014).

In contemporary discourse, music can serve as a reflection and catalyst of societal attitudes, beliefs, and exclusions/inclusions (Grant et al., 2010, p.192). Its power lies in its ability to resonate with diverse audiences for better or for worse, especially in politically strained environments. Coming from a post-conflict environment myself (Croatia), I witnessed firsthand the power of former Yugoslav music as a reconciliatory force between ethnically different individuals – however, I also witnessed the power of modern Croat music and artistry (alongside all of its byproducts) to act as a polarizer of Croat’s perceptions towards a spectrum of minorities. Because

this study aims to look at more than just sheet music and its ideological links and “weaponization,” the term popular culture will be used to refer to the musical scope outlined above. Moreover, throughout the project, popular culture may also be interchangeably referred to specifically as the “artist” and their “byproducts,” with the latter word signaling anything that is a product of the artist (eg. Music video, concert, merch, lyrics, etc.).

The central research question guiding my study is straightforward: How does popular culture contribute to the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics? I aim to shed light on the multifaceted ways in which popular culture intersects with political and social conflicts in the modern post-conflict era, where it can act as a reproductive force of polarizing ideological remains of an armed conflict that at present has ceased. Note that a subtler form of conflict persists in the present day, thus being a “residue” in the post-conflict period that should’ve transcended the conflict.

Multiple benefits can arise by investigating popular culture in relation to the perpetuation of conflictual dynamics. This research contributes to academic discussion by fostering an interdisciplinary exploration across fields (eg. cultural studies, international relations, media studies, and political science). Since popular culture is present in the everyday life of citizens and it permeates social strata, I wish to attempt to provide a more holistic understanding of its link to a facet of conflict. To achieve that, I need to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries which enables me to delve into the construction of narratives, identities, and the dissemination of a type of hegemonic power in society. Furthermore, by illuminating the complexities that define the post-conflict landscape, the research seeks to contribute by paving the way for deeper insights regarding the ways in which residual conflicts persist and potentially hinder reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.

Moreover, regarding real-world relevance, the evocation of conflicts in popular culture – be it through films, television shows, music, or literature – can play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and stereotypes within the in-group about the out-group. On the opposite end of the spectrum, this means that insecurities can arise within the out-group. These representations can reinforce biases, fear, and affect public opinion, particularly in the context of rising populist and nationalist movements, and migration. Understanding the cultural triggers and mechanisms behind the successful permeation of specific dynamics in society is essential for policymakers, peacebuilders, and scholars alike. Ultimately, I aim to contribute – albeit on a very small scale – to the creation of a global society that values differences and seeks common ground, moving past former conflicts and their aftershocks. All of this not in an effort to erase the past or return to it, but to move forward and build something new and better.

The thesis is structured as follows: Section 2 is the literature review focusing on the existing knowledge relating to the link between popular culture (film, music, movies, etc.) and conflict. In section 3, mnemonic hegemony theory is outlined as part of the theoretical framework, and the causal mechanism at the core of this research is proposed. Section 4 is an elaboration on the chosen method of process tracing alongside an explanation of the case selection, data collection, and subsequent data analysis that will act as the observables for the proposed causal mechanism. Section 5 serves a contextual purpose to frame the case study. Section 6 deals with the description and analysis of the observables that showcase the causal mechanism. The final section attempts to answer the research question and conclude with a short summary and recommendations for future work.

2) Literature Review

In the past decade, there has been growing scholarly interest in the intersection of popular culture and conflict. This literature review aims to provide a synthesis of key scholarly contributions in this field by examining popular culture regarding crisis/tensions, and conflictual settings. In most (if not all) of the literature one thing is kept constant, and the same is valid for this project; popular culture – in whatever format – is a place of mediation, a stage if you will, where specific ideas are shown, pushed, or pit against each other to achieve a specific goal.

The structure of the literature review is as follows: I will first synthesize the literature related to popular culture as a generally purely visual medium (film, television shows) in both conflict and post-conflict settings. Second, I will focus on the literature pertaining to music and conflict. At the end of either section I will engage in the literature and showcase some gaps which justify this project. Third, I will showcase a study most similar to the one I am proposing, whilst elaborating how it – alongside the others – is contributing to the creation of the gap I am trying to tackle.

Having asserted that popular culture is the medium, oftentimes a visual one, Duncombe (2019, p.544) argues that the power of popular culture stems from the “sensorial experience through which emotions can be elicited or narrated.” Their study involves the analysis of two television shows (*Homeland* and *The Good Fight*) through which popular culture is seen as a potential shaper or challenger of political identity in crisis and the “post-truth era.” In a similar vein, Huiskamp et al. (2016) look into the use of film by the US military during the 2003 Iraq invasion. In their work, popular culture is argued to be a tool of ideological manipulation and a material with which individuals can construct/deconstruct their political environment (Huiskamp et al., 2016, p.501). Their study is focused on the replenishing of patriotic identity within the US military itself by examining the “film nights” held for the soldiers in Baghdad. Both of these works

focus on two differing contexts (no conflict - conflict) but they hold constant the power of popular culture – especially concerning emotion evocation. Without examining concrete visual products in their analytical paper, Press-Barnathan (2016) also points towards popular culture – in general – as a tool or stage of either shaping or unraveling predominantly negative conflictual narratives.

Once shifted to a post-conflict setting, meaning-making emerges as an additional factor to evocation. Behnke (2006) looks at the re-enchantment and borderline romanticization of war by analyzing two movies. Both movies (from 2001 and 2003) talk about “past conflicts” regarding the context in which they are released, but their goal is to show what the intended audience and their representatives (the soldiers) in the conflict are fighting for and to imbue it with “moral meaning” (Behnke, 2006, p.938). Oftentimes what the “Other” is fighting for is left unshown. A similar study is done by Falk & Mitchell (2015) who look at the replication of assumptions in popular culture (born out of WWII) of how war is produced, fought, and ended – linked to concepts of a just and "good war." Moreover, the book *Militainment Inc.* (Stahl, 2009) looks at contemporary American popular culture and its relationship with war and media. It focuses predominantly on the ways popular culture incites the consumer to participate in what is defined as "militainment" (military + entertainment) through film, video games, etc.

The above section shows that most of the popular culture analyses focus on purely visual mediums. Moreover, the authors tend to focus on how popular culture as an avenue can exacerbate tensions between communities, especially from a US-centric point of view. Therefore, the "Other" present in the popular culture medium related to conflict is not one close to the state and its metaphorical center. The conflicts are distant, impersonal, ideologically charged with ideas of good and bad, and then repackaged and represented to an audience to push specific ideas/narratives

or to prime them for a specific task by evoking past grievances and repackaging them to create meaning to fit the contemporary moment.

Music, in that sense, is rarely present when looking at the intersection of conflict/post-conflict and popular culture – there appears to be an implicit understanding that popular culture must be visual to fulfill its role as an “avenue of ideas.” However, music has been shown to also act as a successful producer of meaning to the average citizen. O’Connell (2021) looks at music as a tool of memorialization of the Gallipoli campaign where the tactical date and exclusion of specific minorities at the commemorative concert sponsored by the Turkish Navy appeared to have the opposite effect of the desired reconciliatory one. Grant et al. (2010, p.188) similarly point towards the importance of music relating to group identity and its power to either worsen or better an intergroup conflict. Their (Grant et al., 2010, p.190) summary of the different approaches to the study of music shows that it can promote violence, however, they choose to approach music as something that isn't inherently violent or peaceful – it is simply imbued with meaning by the intentions with which someone employs it. Such a conceptualization of music can be alluded to in the O'Connell study where the concert may have been to commemorate (as a positive action) but the intentions behind the music may have been not as pure.

The paragraph above shows that the musical focus is not solely on popular culture being personal to the consumer but being once again employed for a reason. Moreover, unlike the visual medium which retains some faux independence, music can seem to act as an active pseudo-mouthpiece of the state. There are no studies that look at what comes out of the consumption of any of the two formats of popular culture, and the focus is on the general narratives presented and the reasoning underpinning them. In that sense, what I wish to look at is not present in the literature.

There is, however, a study done by Baker (2019, p.241) that runs an audiovisual analysis on a war song which contributes to the understanding of popular culture as a space to remember/imagine a “personal emotional connection to the war.” Their study focuses on the construction of the figure of “veteran” in a masculine way, and the specific scope is popular culture in relation to youth engagement and how specific gendered constructions of the war in popular culture exacerbate insecurities in various “out-groups” (women, the LGBTQ+ community, the ethnic “Other”). Baker (2010) is also the author of the book *Sounds of the Borderland* which offers a comprehensive overview of the development of the music industry in relation to politics of the thesis’ chosen case study.

From what I have synthesized so far, I gather that popular culture is an avenue through which meaning is created and evoked – meaning it can act as a discursive avenue for the reinforcing of a constructed collective memory which, rooted in an ideology, can be crucial for the in-group’s perceived survival. However, I noticed that an individual’s agency as contributor to meaning perpetuation within popular culture is missing. The medium is always the final product of the individual and not the individual as a presence alongside the product of their work. Whilst Baker’s study also focuses on the author of the song, they don’t look at the perpetuation of conflictual dynamics in the post-conflict but more so the gendering of war figures and perpetuation of minority insecurity – where all minorities are conflated one with the other. Thus, in the following section, I propose a mechanism to contribute to the literature, and study how popular culture (artist and their byproducts) reproduces residual conflictual dynamics.

3) Theoretical Framework and Causal Mechanism

Since popular culture and conflict are in themselves broad terms and their link is multilayered, this thesis has chosen to focus more on the aspect of memory that can inhabit the crevices of popular culture in a given context. The following is a short elaboration of mnemonic hegemony theory, followed by a conceptualization of the proposed causal mechanism linking popular culture to the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics. The mechanism proposes the occurrence of the exertion of mnemonic hegemony through the figure of an artist (and their byproducts) over their audience in the given artist's "life cycle." The existing theory (applied to a subsequently proposed scheme) situates itself within the understanding that popular culture acts as a stage on which a specific ideological "plot" unfolds and that a necessary condition is the reciprocal relationship between producer and consumer, with a stricter focus set on the individual on the stage.

3.1) Mnemonic Hegemony Theory

The work of Berthold Molden (2015, p.126) proposes mnemonic hegemony theory as an adaptation of other theories of hegemony to best grasp "the power relations inherent in collective memory." This theory highlights the individual or group discursive agency present within specific political context by considering their interests, how narratives gain public trust, and their ability to engage with media and social spheres where knowledge is created and understood. It not only covers the power struggles between dominant and counter-dominant narratives, often referred to as "memory wars," but also acknowledges the presence of passive remembrance communities. Thus, it encapsulates the dynamic interactions between these various domains. Moreover, it seeks to understand the nexus of "material structures, social experience, and discursive practice" (Molden, 2015, p.130). In Molden's (2015, p.128; p.130) theory, hegemony is constructed by playing a game of prioritization with the various memories based on history – it holds that history

is not concrete and inherently true, but open to different interpretations or purposeful disregarding – therefore, any symbol, utterance, or memory possesses multiple interpretations and can be utilized in various ways by different individuals, depending on their background, circumstances, and needs. Molden (2015) employs a Gramscian conceptualization of culture underpinning mnemonic hegemony theory in regard to discussing how media can act as a discursive tool solidifying hegemony. By permeating a memory forged by the state in a non-invasive and blatant way throughout civil society, media (as a pillar of culture) perpetuates and enacts mnemonic notions framed as “common sense” (like Gramsci’s “*senso comune*”) to present seemingly indisputable beliefs as universally applicable truths (Molden, 2015, p.133). The only condition, aside from a deep understanding of the context in which the hegemony operates, is that whatever is presented be recognized, acknowledged, or given attention to within a social context by the receivers.

Mnemonic hegemony theory has been used to analyze the commemoration (of lack thereof) of the Second World War in Thailand, arguing that the spatial distribution of memorabilia on the outer fringes of Bangkok is due to the hegemony the Thai institutions and military exert over their population to frame World War Two memory in a specific way (Raymond, 2018). Moreover, in another work by Molden (2014, p.117) on the creation of a uniform European memory, mnemonic hegemony as a theoretical concept was utilized to identify “dominant Western powers” as part of the mnemonic hegemony ecosystem; this was achieved through a review of the narratives proposed throughout the construction of a collective European narrative. In both works, mnemonic hegemony was applied as a concept or theory, but no works to my knowledge tackled the exertion of mnemonic hegemony through the medium of popular culture as one of the building blocks of civil society.

Subsequently, to explain how mnemonic hegemony theory fits within the broader story of the link between popular culture and the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics, the following mechanism is proposed.

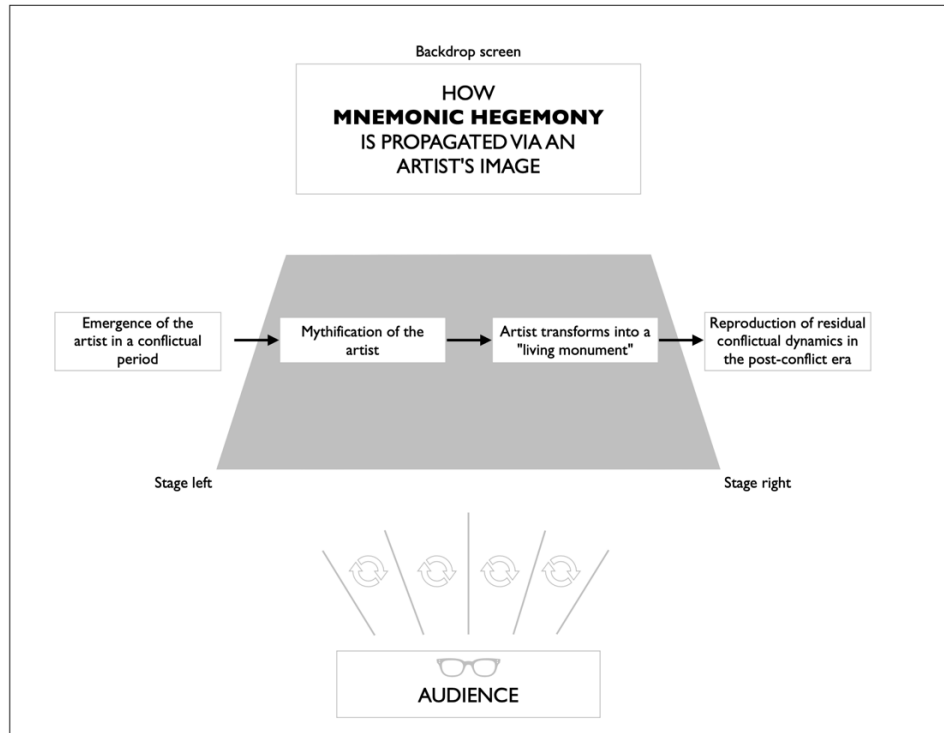


Figure 1: Proposed causal mechanism linking popular culture (artist + byproducts) and the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics in the post-conflict era.

3.2) Causal Mechanism Building Blocks

As elaborated on by Molden, for mnemonic hegemony to be exerted there needs to be a specific narrative behind the memories that made the cut to be echoed to the crowd. In the case of memories and conflict, they can serve an ideological purpose. Therefore, what the emerged artist preaches is not only a narrative, but a specific ideology based on skewed memory to aid in legitimizing or even nation-building. Because this thesis focuses on the link between popular culture and the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics in the present day, one must begin at the most root

of the problem: the conflictual dynamic rooted in ideology which coexists with the armed conflict context in which the artist emerges.

Since the artist is preaching a collective memory constructed within a specific ideology, they need to become synonymous with it by embodying a Barthesian myth. Barthes (as cited in Reid, 2007, p.81) characterizes myth as a communication system, more precisely as a mode of signification. It knows no formal bounds because it's not defined by its outward expression but by the meaning it conveys; anything can be assigned meaning and myth has the capacity to appropriate any subject matter to convey its intended message. According to Barthes (as cited in Reid, 2007, p.82), the primary function of myth is to naturalize the messages it contains. Reid also cites Tudor, who elaborates that the success of a myth hinges on its acceptance as truth by its audience. Once a myth is naturalized, its audience perceives its meaning as factual. Moreover, Reid (2007, p.83) by engaging Barthes, Tudor and Mason, summates that myths enact a social role by crafting a symbolic narrative that connects present audiences with past ones. Myths can be regarded as historical phenomena; however, they may not be historically accurate. Despite the inherent complexity of the consumer's context, myths simplify their experience by absorbing contradictions and presenting a coherent worldview that creates a fictional sense of the consumer's place in history and society. Boer (2011, p.221) builds on the fact that, since mythology presents its narrative as an unquestionable truth, in the process it denies history, contradiction, and organic memory.

But myth is also viewed as slippery and unstable, so it must transform into something more tangible in the realm of memory: a living monument. A living monument can be conceptualized as two different things. According to authors like Lambert (2014) or Eröss (2017), living monuments are actual living memorials – monuments to a past that do not solely serve an

aesthetically commemorative purpose, but they are livable spaces hence the adjective “living.” The second conceptualization is that of Saito (2017, p.151) who examines the film adaptation of a memoir of a Vietnam War veteran which depicts the moment when the veteran “becomes conscious of his social role as a living monument.” In the proposed mechanism, “living monument” is understood to be both the artist and when applicable the physical space inhabited during a concert; it is to be understood in both a “livable” and “social” sense. However, the role the “living monument” fulfills is similar to the classical understating of monument as a commemorative object. It is a selective aid to memory that can speak to a community with specific identity markers (eg. Ethnicity, religion, nationality) and guide them towards a specific interpretation of the past to bind them together with the cultivation of a collective consciousness and identity (Antonova et al., 2017; Maurantonio, 2014; Mitchell, 2003).

Since the “living monument” is an artist, it is important to differentiate them from a “pop star.” In this sense, living monuments and pop stars embody contrasting roles and impacts within society. Living monuments perform the role of representing broader concepts such as cultural identity, historical narratives, or collective memory. Their significance lies in their contribution of the preservation of collective memory by charging their music with specific cultural and mnemonic imagery that resonates with their audience (composed of individuals with strict identity markers) in a trying period. Their presence is enduring, although not always constant, providing a consistent beacon in societal consciousness.

On the other hand, pop stars primarily focus on providing entertainment and producing leisurely music that is commercially successful because it taps into a different type of prevalent audience consciousness (eg. Taylor Swift singing to her predominantly teenage girl fanbase about her breakups or about turning 22). Their impact lies in their ability to captivate and connect with

a broad audience (regardless of specific identity markers) by singing about their experiences. Unlike living monuments, the presence of pop stars may fluctuate, and they may even disappear from the spotlight at times, depending on trends and public interest. Thus, while living monuments serve as enduring symbols of cultural significance, pop stars often operate within the realm of transient popularity and commercial success.

The outcome of the mechanism refers to the lingering tensions, disputes, or unresolved issues from past conflicts or historical events that continue to affect contemporary society by posing a challenge to social cohesion. Residual conflictual dynamics may include unresolved grievances, enduring social divisions, or persistent inequalities stemming from past conflicts, oppression, or perceived injustice characterized as outbursts towards the out-group. These dynamics can be evoked through the artist and their byproducts which embody and drive a particular understanding of the past in relation to feelings of differentiating the in-group from the out-group.

4) Methodology

According to Beach and Pedersen (2019, p.1) process tracing is a “research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within case-empirical analysis of how a causal mechanism operates in real-world cases.” It will allow for the examination of the intricate relationship between popular culture and the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics because as a methodological approach, it entails the creation of a complex causal mechanism that can be contextualized within a specific historical moment. This will enable me to make a strong causal inference if the relevant evidence corroborating the steps of the mechanism is found. Moreover, the context is not something that needs to be "controlled" for, but it is simply an "enabler or inhibitor" (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, p.77). What matters in process tracing is that a typical case is selected because “a case where as many potential contextual conditions are present as possible” is required to detect whether the mechanism linking the cause-outcome is present (Beach & Pedersen, 2018, p.864).

4.1) Case study

The geographic collocation in which the mechanism is tested is that of Croatia from 1991 to the present day. Between 1945 and 1991, Croatia was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) led by Tito. The death of Tito in 1980 initiated a period of political instability, economic decline, and the rise of secessionist nationalist figures like Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and historian Dr. Franjo Tuđman in Croatia (Ramet, 1996). In 1991, Croatia declared independence on the basis of the “thousand year dream” of Croats aspiring to “their own state.” (Pavlaković, 2009, p.5; p.13) This was poorly received by the Serb minority in Croatia which sought to create their own autonomous regions within Croatia. As tensions escalated, a war ensued between *Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija* (JNA – Yugoslav People’s Army) alongside Serb paramilitary groups and *Oružane snage Republike Hrvatske* (OSHR – Armed Forces of the

Republic of Croatia) alongside paramilitary groups such as *Hrvatske obrambene snage* (HOS – Croatian defense forces). The conflict lasted until August 1995 when *Operacija “Oluja”* (Operation Storm) secured “independence and international recognition” alongside the successful liberation of 10,000 square kilometers of Croatian land in a span of four days, thus enabling the “victory of the war” (Pavlaković, 2009, p.7–13).

In the post-conflict period, tensions are ever present – when commemorating the fall of Vukovar (one of the highly concentrated Serbian minority cities in Croatia) from the war, the Serbian minority representatives were not allowed to pay homage to the many Serb victims (Tesija, 2023b). Ivana Polić (2021) reports that to this day there exists a dominant narrative of the war that excludes the recognition of Croat war crime complicity towards minorities – namely Serbs. By mid 2023, Tesija (2023a) reports that “Croatia is still searching for 1,807 people who remain missing from the 1990s war.” Whilst the armed conflict is over, Croats are still reminded of the 90s and in some cases tensions persist which render it a good context to study the proposed mechanism.

Within the Croatian context, Marko Perković “Thompson” has been selected as a typical case because he rose to fame during the *Domovinski Rat* (Homeland War; 1991-1995) with politically charged music. He is widely popular to this day and he is regarded as a “lover” and “defender” of the homeland. Moreover, whilst he may be contested inside and outside of Croatia, he is a figure that is also representative of all homeland-loving “Croats.” Thompson as a case contains the relevant scope conditions which render him suitable for studying the proposed mechanism.

Whilst process tracing is the main methodological approach to tackle this project’s objective, other approaches will be employed to provide mechanistic observables. To investigate

the mythification of the artist, this thesis will delve into aspects of Thompson's persona alongside his byproducts. The songs and lyrics (listed in Appendices A and B) employed in this study can be found on YouTube. Regarding the living monument step, the themes present in his 2006 historical rock album *Bilo jednom u Hrvatskoj* ("Once Upon a Time in Croatia"), his stage presence, and concerts will be inspected. These can be found on YouTube, Google Image Search, on Thompson's public social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram), or as being parts of newspaper articles. To elaborate on the reproduction of residual conflictual dynamics, several Croatian and international newspapers and blogs will be analyzed to gauge the public perception of Thompson, his social agency, and to report of incidents at his concerts. The project will also attempt to showcase the existence of a "common sense" among his fanbase by establishing a link between concert locations and voting habits. This will be achieved by finding where Thompson has held his concerts; this information was provided by his social media accounts, personal website, and online ticket reselling points such as *Entrio* or *Eventim*. The voting outcomes will examine the percentage of votes for HDZ and DP – two political parties intertwined with Thompson's persona and social vision. The relevant voting data was found on the official webpages of the Republic of Croatia (Arhiva Izbora Republike Hrvatske, n.d.; Izborne Jedinice | Hrvatski Sabor, n.d.; Rezultati - Izbori Za Zastupnike U Hrvatski Sabor 2024., n.d.). The two parties' significance will be briefly elaborated on in the following section as part of the context. The scope will be for the 2020 and 2024 Parliamentary elections because the earliest official concert announcement on Thompson's public pages dates back to 2015.

In selecting a single case to run process tracing, I acknowledge the advantages and limitations when investigating the connection between pop culture and the perpetuation of conflictual dynamics. While this approach allows for a thorough examination of causal

mechanisms within a specific context, enhancing internal validity and providing a comprehensive understanding of intricate relationships, it may lack generalizability to broader populations. Nonetheless, the emphasis on depth of insights and internal validity aims to offer a nuanced perspective on how pop culture influences conflict dynamics. In addition, regarding the concert location-voting habits link, the data regarding where concerts were located and when was difficult to find, and incomplete. At times the concert was not announced through any of the official mediums I checked, so I recognize it is not fully representative of the connection I am attempting to make. Nonetheless, it can inform us about a specific political voting habits in the areas that were successfully identified. Moreover, I acknowledge that as a Croatian-Italian national with Serbian roots, I may hold inherent biases towards Thompson and his music; therefore, I have actively sought out diverse perspectives and feedback from peers. Simultaneously, my intimate knowledge of the language and the context in which the mechanism operates will allow me to notice small details, and make it easier for me to analyze and draw inferences more confidently.

5) The Croatian Symbolological Context: Nation-building and Legitimization

Croatia is a young country with a forged history based on a historical narrative of suffering at the hands of SFRY and subsequently Serbia during the *Domovinski Rat* coupled with historical claims to statehood, commemorative practices, and the distortion of certain historical events. To understand the mnemonic hegemony exerted through the living monument, this section introduces you to the symbology present in the invention of Croatia by the hands of the first president Dr. Tuđman.

Multiple theories exist regarding the descentance for the Croats, but the first claim to Croatian statehood stems from medieval times. The first record of a unified Croatian kingdom came with the crowning of king Tomislav. Consequently, many modern day Croatian symbols have their roots in medieval practices. For example, the *šahovnica* (checkered coat of arms) employed in the flag is rooted in the myth of the 10th century king Stjepan Držislav defeating a Venetian prince at chess to regain his freedom, and later incorporating the checkboard in the Croat coat of arms (Bellamy, 1999; 2003). This same symbol was adopted by what Tuđman claimed was the first Croat nation-state: *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (NDH – Independent State of Croatia; 1941-1945) and branded with a “U” above the *šahovnica* to signify the “Ustaša” Nazi movement (Bellamy, 1999). There is contestation of the present day flag being an “ode” to the NDH, however it is denied on the count of the symbol predating the NDH, and the pattern of red-white squares differing (Bellamy, 1999). The one employed by the NDH began with the white square instead of the red one as to signify a leaning towards ethnic purity. One fact that cannot be ignored however, is that the former Croat currency “kuna” (1994–2023) was only ever employed beforehand in the NDH era. Croatian historian Hrvoje Klasić (2021, p.50–51) points out that the initial proposal for a Croat currency post-SFRY was a “kruna” which Tuđman later modified to “kuna” by linking it to the medieval tax called “kunovina” despite being fully aware of the NDH links.

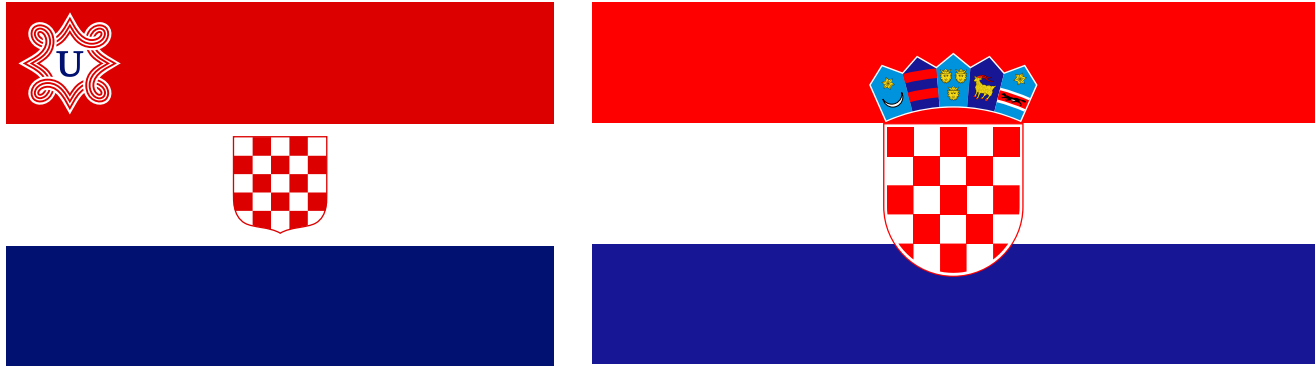


Figure 2: NDH flag (left) and present day flag (right).

Note. The following images were accessed via:

https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zastava_Nezavisne_Dr%C5%BEave_Hrvatske;

https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zastava_Republike_Hrvatske

Most notably, Croatia evokes NDH connection through the *Domovinski Rat* paramilitary group HOS founded by *Hrvatska stranka prava* (HSP – Croatian party of rights). HOS was referred to similarly in the NDH where the “O” stood for *oružane* (armed) instead of *obrambene* (defense) like in the 90s. Moreover, the 90s HOS wore all black (inspired by the NDH-HOS unit *Crna legija* – Black Legion) and utilized the NDH “*Za dom spremni*” (For the homeland, ready) salute (Klasić, 2021, p 119–120). Klasić (2021, p.157) also points out that the NDH salute is often justified as having existed pre-NDH (since the 19th century), however there is a lack of historical evidence to corroborate this narrative.



Figure 3: 90s HOS logo.

Note. The following image was accessed via: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatian_Defence_Forces

Moreover, the Croatian process of nation-building is rooted in Croat self-victimization. Bellamy (2003, p.68–69) notes that Tuđman described the Yugoslav agenda as one that “sought to bind Croats together through a story of common suffering.” In further relation to NDH, one of the main examples of Croat suffering and suppression of independence at the hands of SFRY is the annually commemorated Bleiburg massacre (May 15, 1945) of the Ustaše by Yugoslav partisans. Kolstø (2010, p.1153–1156) observes that the Ustaše were portrayed as “martyrs” that died for the Croatian cause after being treacherously extradited back to Yugoslavia by the British forces. Pavlaković (2009, p.19) points out this has led some right-wing groups to equate the defeated Ustaše from the 40s to the veterans of the *Domovinski Rat* from the 90s as they both valued Croat independent statehood – in the 40s from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and in the 90s from SFRY.

However, Tuđman had to find an “Other” that would last through the years, and the Serbs were chosen on a basis of national history, geopolitics, and culture. From a cultural point of view,

Tuđman argued that Serbs were a community that lacked culture. He stated that Croats were Mediterranean people whose texts were translated “long before Shakespeare and Moliere” whilst the Serbs belonged to a Byzantine culture. Additionally, he argued that the cultural differences were based on the nation’s historical experiences that “produced two nations that were different in their national consciousness, cultural make-up and ‘general historical, state-political and religious tradition’” (Bellamy, 2003, p.68).

Finally, one of the pillars of being Croat is celebrating *Dan pobjede i domovinske zahvalnosti i Dan hrvatskih branitelja* (“The Day of Victory and Homeland Gratitude and the Day of Croatian Veterans”) every August 5th to commemorate “*Oluja*.” There is always a broadcast of the ceremony occurring in Knin, the city which was historically the seat of medieval Croatian kings and the center of the Serb rebellion in the 90s – the region surrounding Knin is referred to by the Serbs as *Republika Srpska Krajina* (RSK – Republic of Serbian Krajina).

5.1) Croatian Media and Values in the 90s

In May 1990, following Franjo Tuđman's electoral victory, HDZ initiated a process of gaining control over radio and television stations in Croatia. During this period, government-owned media outlets were utilized exclusively for ideological purposes related to the War. Certain publications were shuttered for political motives, often under the guise of privatization or restructuring (Nizich, 1995). Several daily newspapers and “state television” were controlled by HDZ which meant that musicians ideologically aligned with the party enjoyed advantages in production, distribution, and media coverage (Ramet et al., 2008). This shows that with the rise of nationalism in Croatia, the new state utilized popular culture as a means to influence national identities (Vuletic, 2011). This phenomenon pertains to the construction of Croatian identity legitimized through historical

discourse, which is portrayed as composed of "ethnic Croats" who speak a pure Croatian language and adhere to Roman Catholicism (Bellamy, 2003).

5.2) Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (HDZ – Croatian Democratic Union) and Domovinski Pokret (DP – Homeland Movement)

HDZ is a prominent political party in Croatia. Founded in 1989, it played a significant role in the country's independence from Yugoslavia and has since been a major force in Croatian politics (O Nama, n.d.). Led by figures such as Franjo Tuđman, the party has generally advocated for Croatian nationalism, conservatism, and center-right policies. Over the years, HDZ has experienced periods of both dominance and opposition in Croatian politics, maintaining influence through electoral victories (2020) and coalitions (2024).

On the other hand, DP emerged more recently as a political organization in Croatia. Founded in 2020 by Miroslav Škoro, a former HDZ member and prominent musician, DP posits itself as a conservative and nationalist alternative to established political parties like the HDZ (O Nama – Domovinski Pokret, n.d.; Šobak, 2020). The movement has gained attention for its emphasis on issues such as anti-corruption, national sovereignty, and traditional values alongside a penchant for historical revisionism (by denying the NDH's Nazi puppet state status) and discriminatory rhetoric towards the Serbian minority in Croatia (Telegram, 2024). In the wake of the recent Parliamentary elections, it's important to note DP has formed a majority government with HDZ with one of the conditions being no parliamentary representation of the Serbian minority party SDSS (Metelko, 2024).

6) Mechanistic Observables

6.1) *Artistic Emergence: A Short Biography of Marko Perković “Thompson”*

As found in Domoljub’s (2018) YouTube reupload of the short documentary “Tko je Marko Perković Thompson?” (Who is Marko Perković Thompson?), Marko Perković was born in 1966 in Čavoglave – a small village found between Knin and Split. As the Serbian occupation of RSK began in the 90s, Thompson joined the “Čavoglave Battalion” of the OSHR. Perković stated that he was armed with a “Thompson,” an American submachine gun manufactured during the First World War, as no other machine guns were available. As a result, he was humorously referred to as Thompson during the war and he subsequently adopted it his stage name. The first song he ever wrote and published was *Bojna Čavoglave* (“Čavoglave Battalion”) in 1991. Thompson’s significant musical structuring around HDZ’s state narratives drove him to the status of one of the more boosted musicians in the early years of the state.

6.2) *Thompson: the Myth of the “Branitelj”*

Thompson’s music and persona emulates the ideological backing of the state of Croatia presented in HDZ’s nation-building efforts, and the themes present in his discography are based on these narratives. For example, the 1996 song *Geni Kameni* (“Genes of Stone”) employs consistent religious imagery and alludes to a genetic homogeneity amongst Croats. It also alludes to the escape of the Ustaše from what became Yugoslavia in 1945 after the defeat of the Axis powers by stating that 1945 had “scattered us around the world,” with the employment of the pronoun “us” showing a connection between the actors in the 1945 events and present day Croats. The song also implies royal “blue blood” flows in the veins of Croats, and that they are “white of face.” This ambiguous statement could link back to the olden concept of paleness as being of a higher social

class, or it could be a more racially coded message in line with NDH values. Moreover, songs such as *Bog i Hrvati* (“God and the Croats;” 2003) allude to Croat suffering at the hands of Yugoslavia and embody the victim narrative found in HDZ’s program alongside the iteration that the Croatian blessed land was God-given to the people.

Since we are examining a multitude of Thompson’s byproducts, important attention should be paid to the symbology in his outfits. As can be seen in Figure 4 (following page), Thompson is often wearing a pendant with a medieval Catholic Cross imprint. The base of his outfits is often black (which can be linked to the HOS way of dressing), and the patch present on his left shoulder bears the text: *Ora et labora* (“Pray and work,” the name of his 2013 album). In other instances he can be seen wearing a camo printed shirt with the HOS patch which contains the controversial NDH salute.



Figure 4: Thompson's concert outfits.

Note. The following images were accessed via: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marko_Perkovi%C4%87; <https://www.jutarnji.hr/scena/domace-zvijezde/thompson-otkazao-koncert-zbog-zdravstvene-situacije-u-obitelji-objavljeno-ko-ko-nastupiti-umjesto-njega-15219642> <https://www.espreso.co.rs/svet/hrvatska/1088961/otkazan-tompsonov-koncert>;

Given that Thompson participated in the war, the myth he emulates is that of a *branitelj* (“defender”) which is the term used to refer to *Domovinski Rat* veterans in Croatia. Thompson epitomized this concept by positioning himself as both a veteran, and the spokesperson and supporter of veteran protesters (Vecernji.Hr, 2017). By equating himself to the iconic figure of the defender and donning outfits that evoke mnemonic links to the war, Thompson flattens the complex ideological plane on which the Croatian state is established, and simplifies the narratives in which the average audience member believes. Within the myth of the *branitelj* there is no space allocated to the questioning of HOS, the NDH, or the narrative of Croatian state legitimacy – these inquires represent a Pandora’s box that should never be opened because they are perceived as unpatriotic and anti-Croat. Therefore, this celebrated figure absorbs the inconsistencies present in the very pillars of the carefully constructed Croatian national identity and presents history as a linear and simple storyline in his music and essence. This creates a specific understanding of Croatia, the war, and what it means to belong to the in-group for his audience – something that can be seen further in the following section.

6.3) Thompson: the Myth Transforms into a “living monument”

In 2006, Marko Perković released *Bilo jednom u Hrvatskoj* (“Once Upon a Time in Croatia”), an album that serves as a historical rock opera centered around Croatian mythology. It features tracks such as *Početak* (“Beginning”) and *Dolazak Hrvata* (“The Arrival of the Croats”), which narrate Croatian history and identity, whilst tunes like *Kletva kralja Zvonimira* (“Curse of King Zvonimir”) delve into Croatian legends. Concluding with *Ratnici svjetla* (“Warriors of Light”), which delves into the memory of a fallen soldier, Thompson urges everyone to preserve it. The song concludes with comrades, families, and the community coming together, holding candles as symbols of unity and hope, embodying the concept of “soldiers of light.” This album is an instance

in which Thompson and the myth he embodies perpetuates concrete historical narratives and even urges the preservation of memory to his audience. The songs imbued with meaning coupled with his stage presence – for those who attend his concerts – reinforce the specific collective memory he represents regarding Croatia and Croats. Moreover, the annual concerts held on August 5th, commemorating *Operacija “Oluja”* in Čavoglave, as well as the 20th-anniversary celebration in 2015 in Knin, serve as significant symbols of the collective remembrance process by acting as the venue and avenue for memorializing the war with targeted mnemonic pins (Telegram & Hina, 2015). This yearly tradition of the concert thus contributes to the remembering of selective historical narratives which erases the complexity of the events of 1995 (eg. Krajina Serb suffering caused by uprooting or death) and evokes strong feelings of patriotism and remembrance of the war and the *branitelji* in the broader context of historical legitimacy (Klasić, 2021, p.176–179).

Most interestingly, when analyzing footage from his concerts, it becomes evident that the waving of the Croatian flag is not the sole occurrence. At the outset of his shows (and the song *Bojna Čavoglave*), Thompson typically initiates with the call *Za dom!* (“For the homeland”), to which fans respond with *Spremni!* (“Ready”). Young attendees can be seen donning Ustaša or HOS attire and some have even been pictured doing the Nazi salute (see Figures 5 and 6). Furthermore, flags featuring the *šahovnica* pattern with a white first square are prominently displayed among the audience (see Figure 7).



Figure 5: Pictures taken at “Thompson” concerts. Ustaša attire (left) and Nazi Salute (right).

Note. The following images were accessed via:

https://www.057info.hr/images/vijesti/orginal/ustase_1207838399.jpg;

https://web.archive.org/web/20081029145525/http://www.adl.org/marko_perkovic/



Figure 6: Concertgoers donning HOS insignia at 2013 concert.

Note. The following image was accessed via: <https://www.vecernji.hr/showbiz/thompson-marko-perkovic-zadar-koncert-1213116>

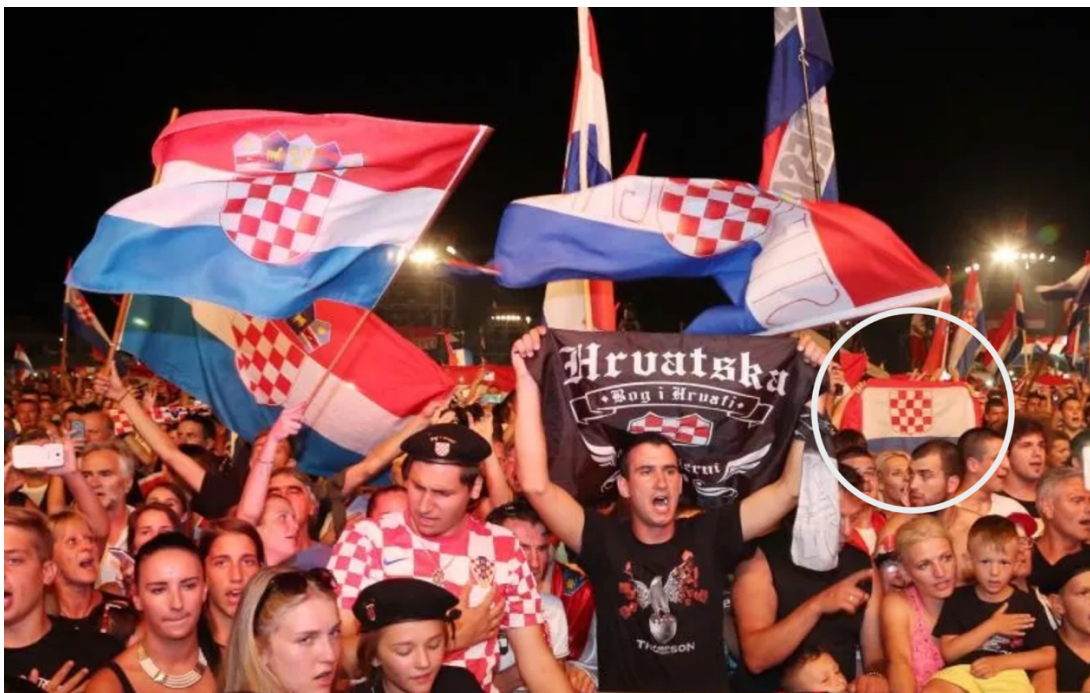


Figure 7: Ustaša flag with the white square at 2015 concert; circled.

Note. The following image was accessed via: <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/thompson-je-koncert-u-kninu-pred-60-000-ljudi-otvorio-ustaskim-pozdravom-za-dom-spremni/>

Thus, Thompson and his byproducts in service of “living monument” are a targeted tool for memory evocation, capable of resonating with a select community and steering them towards a particular understanding of history by fostering a shared consciousness and identity. This can be seen by the copious amounts of NDH-related symbols carelessly present at his concerts. His byproducts go beyond leisurely entertainment, as they play a role in reinforcing cultural identity and safeguarding a collective memory based on the ideological flattening present in the previous part of the mechanism. Whilst there is a lack of measure of the concrete emotions he evokes in his audience, his fans’ behavior during concerts and physical self-representation underline a reciprocity between themselves and what Thompson stands for – I doubt most of them would wear something associated with Nazism if they knew the complexity of the slogans and flags they display.

6.4) *Thompson and his Byproducts: the Reproduction of Residual Conflictual Dynamics*

6.4.1) “Thompson’s” Music and The Narratives Surrounding Him and his Byproducts

Despite starting his concerts with the NDH salute, not all of his music is historically revisionist – some can come across as quite aggressive. The songs *Bojna Čavoglave* (“Čavoglave Battalion”) and *Anica Kninska Kraljica* (“Anica Queen of Knin”) hold significantly harsher tones. The latter speaks of setting fire to *Krajina* all the way to Knin, alongside setting fire to “two, three Serbian headquarters” so that Thompson’s journey wasn’t in vain. The former, starts with the infamous salute and proceeds to label the Serb SVK volunteers as bandits and Chetniks (Serbian 40s Nazi collaborators). The song continues by stating that the “God’s justice” will reach the Serbs alongside the Croat “hand,” and that “The warriors from Čavoglave shall be their judges!”

The public perception regarding Serbian discrimination is also not favorable for the case of Thompson. Amnesty International has noted that Serbs (alongside Roma) are still being discriminated in Croatia (Kolar & Hina, 2024). In Thompson’s case there have been incidents of anti-Serb chants, and at times more concretely “kill the Serb,” at his concerts (Index.Hr, 2008; Milekic, 2018). In addition, it has been alleged that “Thompson” has sung a famous Ustaša song (“Gradiška Stara i Jasenovac”) that glorifies the killing of Serbs through lyrics such as: “In Čapljina there was a slaughterhouse, a lot of Serb bodies were carried by [river] Neretva” (Babić, 2003; Klasić, 2021). It is ironic that Thompson refers to the Serbs as Chetniks in one of his songs whilst he himself dons HOS insignia, does the NDH salute, and sings Ustaša songs.

Such displays have garnered Thompson a ban from performing in certain European states, and even a three year entry ban for the EU (Grubušić, 2017; Kronast, 2009; Vidov, 2014). Furthermore, he has been labeled a “Nazi sympathizer” and legitimizing force to fascist

worldviews. The Simon Wiesenthal Center – a Jewish global human rights organization researching the Holocaust and hate in a historic and contemporary context – has slammed the inclusion of Thompson in the 2018 World Cup celebration in Zagreb (Balkans, 2018; Hajdari & Colborne, 2018). Chief director of Eastern European Affairs Dr. Efraim Zuroff stated that:

“Marko Perkovic has never missed an opportunity to transmit his hateful messages. It is no accident that numerous people show up at his concerts wearing Ustasha uniforms and/or symbols and give Ustasha salutes. He should not be an honored guest anywhere, let alone at one of the biggest gatherings in democratic Croatian history to celebrate a magnificent sporting achievement.” (Wiesenthal Center Slams Inclusion of Fascist Singer Thompson in Croatian Football Team Celebration/ Reception in Zagreb, n.d.)

6.4.2) Voting Habits – Concert Locations

MAP NO.	DATE	LOCATION	COUNTY (HR-ENG)		MUNICIPALITY (HR - ENG)		VOTING UNIT 2024	VOTING UNIT 2020
1	5.8.2015 and 5.8.2016	Knin	Šibensko-kninska županija	Šibenik-Knin County	Grad Knin	Knin City	IX	IX
2	19.5.2018	Čakovec	Medimurska županija	Medimurje County	Grad Čakovec	Čakovec City	III	III
3	2.6.2018	Garčin	Brodsko-posavske županije	Brod-Posavina County	Općina Garčin	Garčin Municipality	V	V
4	2.8.2018	Davor	Brodsko-posavske županije	Brod-Posavina County	Općina Davor	Davor Municipality	V	V
5	7.5.2018	Čista Velika	Šibensko-kninska županija	Šibenik-Knin County	Općina Vodice	Vodice Municipality	IX	IX
6	10.8.2018	Konjščina	Krapinsko-zagorska županija	Krapine-Zagorje County	Općina Konjščina	Konjščina Municipality	III	III
7	18.8.2018	Koprivnički Bregi	Koprivničko-križevačka županija	Koprivnica-Križevci County	Općina Koprivnički Bregi	Koprivnički Bregi Municipality	IV	II
8	31.8.2019	Skradin	Šibensko-kninska županija	Šibenik-Knin County	Grad Skradin	Skradin City	IX	IX
9	15.9.2018	Antunovac	Osječko-baranjska županija	Osijek-Baranja County	Općina Antunovac	Antunovac Municipality	IV	IV
10	7.9.2019	Solin	Špišsko-dalmatinska županija	Split-Dalmatia County	Grad Solin	Solin City	IX	X
11	27.9.2019	Jaruge	Brodsko-posavske županije	Brod-Posavina County	Općina Sikirevci	Sikirevci Municipality	V	V
12	10.11.2019	Pisarovina	Zagrebačka županija	Zagreb County	Općina Pisarovina	Pisarovina Municipality	I	VII
13	6.12.2019	Dubrovnik	Dubrovačko-neretvanska županija	Dubrovnik-Neretva County	Grad Dubrovnik	Dubrovnik City	X	X
14	9.7.2021	Slavonski Brod	Brodsko-posavske županije	Brod-Posavina County	Grad Slavonski Brod	Slavonski Brod City	V	V
15	17.7.2021	Sinj	Špišsko-dalmatinska županija	Split-Dalmatia County	Grad Sinj	Sinj City	IX	IX
16	24.7.2021	Našice	Osječko-baranjska županija	Osijek-Baranja County	Grad Našice	Našice City	IV	IV
17	10.9.2021	Zadar	Zadarska županija	Zadar County	Grad Zadar	Zadar City	IX	IX
18	14.5.2022	Osijek	Osječko-baranjska županija	Osijek-Baranja County	Grad Osijek	Osijek City	IV	IV
19	30.5.2022	Karlovac	Karlovačka županija	Karlovac County	Grad Karlovac	Karlovac City	VII	VII
20	15.6.2022	Virovitica	Virovitičko-podravska županija	Virovitica-Podravina County	Grad Virovitica	Virovitica City	IV	IV
21	21.6.2022	Popovača - Sportski park Moslavac	Sisačko-moslavačka županija	Sisak-Moslavina County	Grad Popovača	Popovača City	VII	VI
22	2.7.2022	Radošić - Etno eko selo Škopljanci	Špišsko-dalmatinska županija	Split-Dalmatia County	Općina Lečevica	Lečevica Municipality	IX	IX

Figure 8: Table showing the concert dates, locations, regions, municipalities, and relevant 2020 and 2024 voting units.

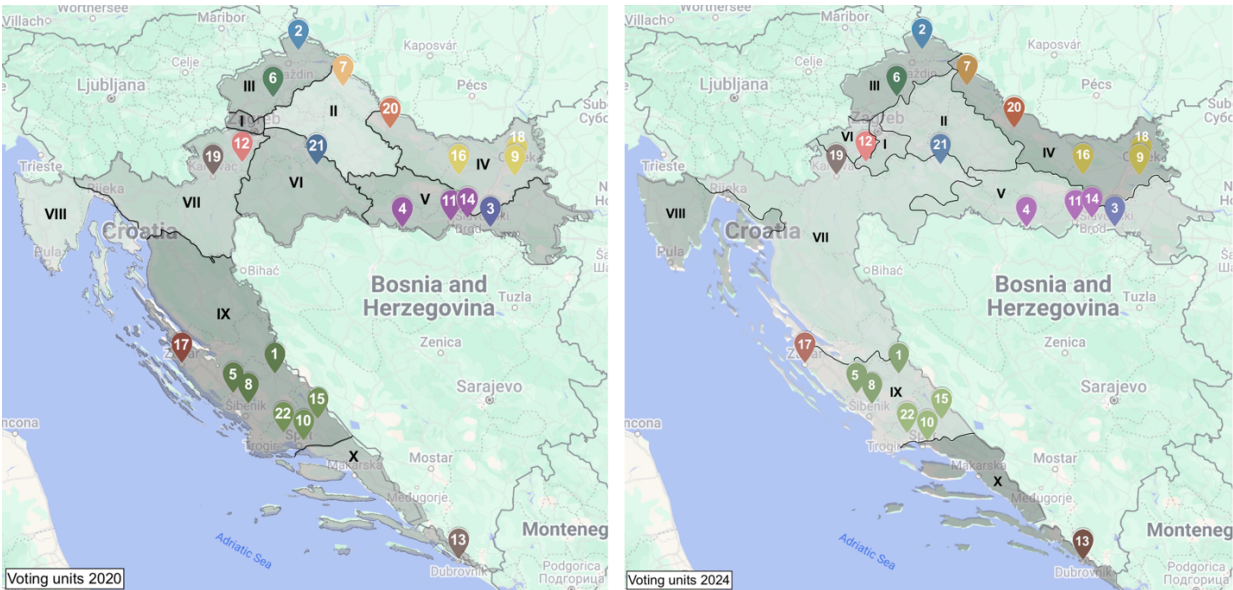


Figure 9: Visualization of 2020 and 2024 Croatian Parliamentary elections voting units over concert locations between 2015 – 2022.

Note. Made with Google My Maps <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/>

In an attempt to find a fingerprint of a “common sense,” the topic of concert locations and the likelihood of specific voting habits being present came to mind for two reasons: Thompson being politically active by calling on his followers to vote and his deep ideological intertwining with HDZ and DP ideology which is most likely present in the audience which accepts and reciprocates the mnemonic crumbs he scatters.

Since artists are more likely to hold concerts where audience turnout is favorable, Figures 10 and 11 demonstrate the predominance of an existence of a “common sense” in the locations in which Thompson has performed. In 2020 only one out of twenty-two municipalities voted predominantly SDP, whereas the combined votes of HDZ and DP covered between 40-80% of all valid ballot papers in the remaining locations. In 2024, three out of twenty-two municipalities voted predominantly SDP. However, there was still a very strong HDZ and DP presence in the remaining locations.

VOTING UNIT 2020	CONCERT MUNICIPALITY	HDZ VOTES	DP VOTES	HDZ + DP COMBINED		TOTAL VOTES *		
I	/	/	/	/	/	/		
II	Općina Koprivnički Bregi	222	139	361	52.39%	689		
III	Grad Čakovec	1896	541	2437	22.24%	10960	SDP PREDOMINANT with 55,62% of votes	
	Općina Konjščina	558	83	641	40.72%	1574		
IV	Općina Antunovac	1195	248	1443	81.85%	1763		
	Grad Našice	2944	997	3941	63.50%	6206		
	Grad Osijek	16184	6371	22555	55.38%	40729		
	Grad Virovitica	3563	1611	5174	56.84%	9103		
V	Općina Garčin	875	325	1200	72.20%	1662		
	Općina Davor	614	134	748	70.50%	1061		
	Općina Sikirevci	499	154	653	78.49%	832		
	Grad Slavonski Brod	9028	2984	12012	60.17%	19965		
VI	Grad Popovača	1655	608	2263	55.28%	4094		
VII	Općina Pissarovina	619	175	794	58.38%	1360		
	Grad Karlovac	9530	2122	11652	53.24%	21886		
VIII	/	/	/	/	/	/		
IX	Grad Knin	2059	563	2622	67.08%	3909		
	Općina Vodice	1811	563	2374	55.34%	4290		
	Grad Skradin	977	173	1150	75.71%	1519		
	Grad Sinj	4094	903	4997	52.78%	9467		
	Grad Zadar	10972	2599	13571	50.80%	26715		
	Općina Lečevica	209	22	231	82.80%	279		
X	Grad Dubrovnik	6970	1515	8485	49.22%	17239		
	Grad Solin	4038	1341	5379	56.72%	9483		

Figure 10: Table showing the 2020 Parliamentary Election voting outcomes (valid ballot papers) per municipality in which concerts were held.

VOTING UNIT 2024	CONCERT MUNICIPALITY	HDZ VOTES	DP VOTES	HDZ + DP COMBINED		TOTAL VOTES *		
I	Općina Pissarovina	607	229	836	46%	1817		
II	/	/	/	/	/	/		
III	Grad Čakovec	2092	397	2489	17.42%	14290	SDP PREDOMINANT with 36,02% of votes	
	Općina Konjščina	490	92	582	31.29%	1860		SDP PREDOMINANT with 44,56% of votes
IV	Općina Koprivnički Bregi	237	160	397	41.01%	968	SDP PREDOMINANT with 45,24% of votes	
	Općina Antunovac	1380	198	1578	78.74%	2004		
	Grad Našice	3400	782	4182	55.74%	7503		
	Grad Osijek	21954	5841	27795	53.67%	51788		
	Grad Virovitica	4563	947	5510	51.90%	10616		
V	Općina Garčin	777	280	1057	55.22%	1914		
	Općina Davor	665	162	827	67.95%	1217		
	Općina Sikirevci	503	178	681	70.06%	972		
	Grad Slavonski Brod	9547	3125	12672	51.11%	24793		
VI	/	/	/	/	/	/		
VII	Grad Karlovac	9925	2674	12599	46.12%	27319		
	Grad Popovača	2041	546	2587	49.96%	5178		
VIII	/	/	/	/	/	/		
IX	Grad Knin	2208	527	2735	56.11%	4874		
	Općina Vodice	1963	592	2555	51.28%	4982		
	Grad Skradin	876	207	1083	68.41%	1583		
	Grad Solin	4728	1599	6327	49.04%	12903		
	Grad Sinj	4709	1150	5859	48.25%	12144		
	Grad Zadar	11428	3510	14938	42.03%	35539		
	Općina Lečevica	193	18	211	72.51%	291		
X	Grad Dubrovnik	7265	2198	9463	45.91%	20614		

Figure 11: Table showing the 2024 Parliamentary Election voting outcomes (valid ballot papers) per municipality in which concerts were held.

Because HDZ's and DP's political programs are strongly intertwined with Tuđman's invention of Croatia – which is subsequently intertwined with the mnemonic notions present in Thompson's byproducts– one can allude to a presence of a specific “common sense” rooted in particular conceptualizations of Croatian history and ethnic belonging. Given that the relationship between artist and audience is a reciprocal one, it is not argued that Thompson influenced the votes but that his commercial success in those municipalities was brought on by a collective memory shared by himself and his audience – one which is simply reflected in the audience's voting patterns.

7) Conclusion

In the intricate landscape of post-conflict Croatia, the enduring echoes of the sounds of war reverberate through the avenue of popular culture. This thesis has examined the profound impact of popular culture on the perpetuation of residual conflictual dynamics through nuggets of mnemonic markers that serve as pins in the quilt of one of the many facets that is Croat collective memory and identity. Popular culture was shown to aid in the perpetuation of residual conflictual dynamics because it enables the creation of an anti-dialectic space in which a one-sided dialogue operates to permeate an ideology to whoever is willing to listen and accept it as fact. This space promotes a skewed collective memory by employing a painful recent history and distorting it.

This work's exploration into the figure of Thompson has revealed the potent role of cultural icons in shaping mnemonic narratives. Thompson's work exemplifies how popular culture can drive and reinforce a "common sense" consolidated in nationalist sentiments and historical grievances, thus contributing to a continuously polarized societal landscape. He emerged in a conflictual period and embodied a myth (and subsequently living monument) that perpetuated a palatable collective memory whose effects were visible in concert incidents and the "common sense" of the regions he's most performed in. His lyrics and public persona serve not only as entertainment but as a powerful vehicle for ideological subliminal messaging, reinforcing specific public perceptions and perpetuating the "us versus them" mentality that underpins many post-conflict societies.

Given the complexity of the Croatian context which has no explicit head or tail, the present research could've benefited from more space to further substantiate parts of the mechanism with surveys or interviews. Moreover, whilst an interdisciplinary approach enriched the analysis, it also presented challenges in terms of integrating diverse conceptualizations. Furthermore, the reliance on qualitative methods may have hindered subjectivity, generalizability and the ability to measure

the broader impact of popular culture on society due to the lack of quantitative data. Additionally, as with any research, there was the potential for bias in selecting and interpreting data.

However, this thesis has also underscored the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in studying the dynamics of post-conflict societies by providing a holistic view of how popular culture functions as both a reflection and a shaper of collective memory by impacting socialization and behavior. Furthermore, looking the artist and their byproducts filled the gap in the existing literature linking facets of popular culture (usually visual) to conflict. Moreover, the application of mnemonic hegemony to yet another example allowed for a deeper exploration and understanding of its core principles and illustrated the theory's relevance in a new context from the ones it had been applied to previously by focusing on an individual through which the hegemony operates.

Future research could expand through a comparative study with the Russian singer “Shaman” once the conflict in Ukraine reaches an end, or other countries with similar post-conflict dynamics. This could provide broader insights into the role of popular culture in shaping collective memory and identity. Additionally, as aforementioned, in-depth interviews and focus groups with artists, cultural critics, historians, and ordinary citizens, would be beneficial to capture a wider range of perspectives and enrich the analysis.

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9) Appendices

Appendix A: Discography

- “Thompson” Perković, M. (1991) Bojna Čavoglave [song]. On: (2008) *Druga strana* [album]. Croatia Records. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfUCdsLgr4Y&pp=ygUPYm9qbmEgY2F2b2dsYXZl>
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- “Thompson” Perković, M. (2013) Bog i Hrvati [song]. On: *Ora et Labora* [album]. Croatia Records. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlPorgkdHkE&pp=ygUVYm9nIGkgaHJ2YXRpIHRob21wc29u>

Appendix B: Original lyrics and translations

Bojna Čavoglave – Čavoglave Battalion

<p>Za Dom - Spremni!</p> <p>U Zagori na izvoru rijeke Čikole Stala braća da obrane naše domove</p> <p>Stoji Hrvat do Hrvata, mi smo braća svi Nećete u Čavoglave dok smo živi mi!</p> <p>Tuce thompson, kalašnjikov a I zbrojevka Baci bombu, goni bandu preko izvora</p> <p>Korak naprijed, puška gotovs'i uz pjesmu svi Za Dom braćo, za slobodu, borimo se mi!</p> <p>Čujte srpski dobrovoljci, bando četnici Stici ce vas naša ruka I u Srbiji!</p> <p>Stici ce vas Božja pravda, to vec svatko zna Sudit' će vam bojovnici iz Čavoglava!</p> <p>Slusajte sad poruku od Svetog Ilije: Nećete u Čavoglave, niste ni prije!</p> <p>Oj Hrvati, braćo mila iz Čavoglava Hrvatska vam zaboravit neće nikada!</p>	<p>For the homeland – ready!</p> <p>In Zagora, at the source of the Čikola river, We stood, brothers, to defend our homes.</p> <p>Croats standing shoulder to shouler, we're all brothers, You won't get into Čavoglave whilst we are alive!</p> <p>Fire your Tompson, Kalashnikov and Zbrojovka Throw the grenade, chase the bandits over the spring</p> <p>Step forward, guns ready, let us all sing the song: For our Home, brothers, for freedom, we are fighting</p> <p>Listen you, Serbian volunteers, band of Chetniks, Our hand will reach you even in Serbia!</p> <p>God's justice will reach you, everyone already knows that. The warriors from Čavoglave shall be your judges!</p> <p>Listen now to the message of Saint Ilia: You won't get in Čavoglave as you couldn't enter it before!</p> <p>Oh, Croats, dear brothers from Čavoglave, Croatia won't ever forget what you did!</p>
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Anica Kninska Kraljica – Anica Queen of Knin

Zbog Anice i bokala vina zapalit ću Krajinu do Knina	Because of Anica and the jug of wine I'll burn Krajina all the way to Knin
Zapalit ću dva, tri srpska štaba da ja nisam dolazio djaba	I'll burn, two, three serbian headquarters So that I wasn't coming in vain
Hej, Anice Kninska Kraljice x3	Hey Anica, queen of Knin x3
Zbog Anice i bokala vina zapalit ću Krajinu do Knina	Because of Anica and the jug of wine I'll burn Krajina to Knin
Ej, Hrvati sjetimo se Knina Hrvatskoga kralja Zvonimira	Hey Croats let's remember Knin Croatian King Zvonimir
Hej, Anice Kninska Kraljice x6	Hey Anica, queen of Knin x6

Geni Kameni – Genes of Stone

Čvrsta ruka i poštenje Sveta voda i krštenje Budi čovik to je dika Budi roda svoga slika	A firm hand and honesty Holy water and baptism Be a man, it's an honor Be an image of your people/gender
Ne daj na se, ne daj svoje Nemoj tuđe, prokleta je Jer 'ko život tako prođe Ponosan pred Boga dođe	Don't give in, don't give up your own Don't take someone else's, it's cursed Because whoever lives life this way Comes before God proud
Gdje god da te život nosi Uvik moraš znati ko si, hej	Wherever life takes you You must always know who you are, hey
Geni, geni kameni Vatra gori u meni! Geni, geni kameni Takvi smo mi rođeni! Uzmi ili ostavi	Genes, genes of stone Fire burns inside of me Genes, genes of stone This is the way we're born Take it or leave it
Loša bila čet'es' peta Rasula nas preko svijeta A sad nova loza raste Vratile se doma laste	'45 was a bad year Scattered us around the world And now new bloodlines grow The swallows have return home
Plave krvi, bijelog lica Rađaju se nova dica Na kamenu ka' na svili Di oduvik mi smo bili	Blue of blood, white of face New children are born On stone as on silk Where we have always been

Bog i Hrvati – God and the Croats

<p>Udijelio Svevisnji narodu mom najljepšu zemlju pod nebom prosulo sunce čudesni sjaj na zemlju što bješe k'o raj</p>	<p>The Almightyest has granted my people The most beautiful land beneath the sky The sun has spilled out its miraculous shine Onto the land that was like Heaven</p>
<p>Ooo, zemlja k'o raj ooo, čudesni sjaj</p>	<p>Ohh, a land like Heaven Ohh, miraculous shine</p>
<p>Prvog nam kralja pomaza Bog i dao mu blagoslov svoj da vodi svoj narod kroz trnje i led zakon da vlada i red</p>	<p>Our first king was anointed by God And He gave him his blessing To lead his nation through thorns and ice For law and order to govern</p>
<p>Ooo, trnje i led ooo, zakon i red</p>	<p>Ohh, thorns and ice Ohh, law and order</p>
<p>A narod k'o narod lako ga prevari zlo i komad po komad on gubi to sveto tlo Svevišnjeg bijes, puče k'o grom i zakloni Sunce što sjalo je narodu mom Svevisnjeg bijes, puče k'o grom i nikada, nikada mira u narodu mom narodu mom</p>	<p>And the people easily deceived by evil piece by piece lose their holy land The fury of the Almighty, cracks like thunder And blocks the Sun that shined on my nation The fury of the Almighty, cracks like thunder And there will never, never, be peace in my nation</p>
<p>Kroz bespuca proslosti trpise bol i putem ih odvede zlo on cecka da cuje molitve glas da udijeli nadu i spas</p>	<p>Through the wasteland of the pain they suffered in the past And by the path that evil leads them down He waits to hear a voice of prayer To grant hope and redemption</p>
<p>Macevi su sjekli andjele i svece bune su se gušile krikovima djece</p>	<p>The swords have cut the angels and the saints The mutinies have muffled the screams of the children</p>

<p>poslanicko ropstvo pet stoljeca tuge boljševička neman radjala je sluge</p>	<p>Ottoman slavery five centuries of grief The Bolshevik monster gave birth to servants</p>
<p>Palile su silne vatre domove i sela gonilo je more kamen prkos zemlja cijela</p>	<p>Mighty fires burned down homes and villages the whole earth was driven by the sea, the stone, the defiance</p>
<p>probodenih srca i nevine krvi koji nisu krivi padali su prvi prodane duse za lažni sjaj prolise suze zemlji k'o raj</p>	<p>Of pierced hearts and innocent blood Those who are not guilty fell first souls sold for false shine shed tears on the Earth like heaven</p>
<p>Gospine suze brisao Bog ne placi kraljice naroda mog nek' odbace zlo u duboki vir vratit cu zemlju i dat cu im mir</p>	<p>God wiped away the Lady's tears Don't cry, queen of my nation Let them cast evil into the deep whirlpool I will return the land and give peace to them</p>
<p>Uslisi molitve narodu Bog ugasi vatru i dim vrati joj staru slavu i sjaj zemlji sto bjese k'o raj</p>	<p>God heard the prayers of the nation He extinguished the fire and the smoke He returned its old glory and shine To the land that shone like Heaven</p>
<p>Al' opet se nad nas nadvilo zlo vreba i čeka svoj čas cuje li narod povijesti glas samo u Bogu je spas</p>	<p>But evil hangs over us again It lies in ambush and waits for its hour Do the people hear the voice of history Salvation is in God alone</p>